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Most twentieth-century criticism of Christian mysticism in the B-text of William Langland's Piers Plowman focuses on manuscript divisions and their equations with pre-existing mystical triads, particular scenes, or significant dreams. Most interpreters have neglected the fact that the whole scope of the poem is a gradual development toward mystical Union for Will, the folke of the field, Piers, and Conscience. The purpose of this thesis is to substantiate the validity of one particular mystical reading of the poem --a reading that views Piers Plowman as a mystical guide to inclusive and exclusive mystical salvation through Truth for Will, the folke, and Conscience--and to show afresh how such an interpretation reveals the artistic unity of the whole poem.

The basic theme and recurring pattern throughout the eight successive dream visions in Piers Plowman is the journey or quest for exclusive and inclusive mystical perfection on earth. The more important quests for Truth are undertaken by the poet-dreamer Will, the folke, Piers, and Conscience. The method of these pilgrimages is not linear but allegorically dramatic.

The poet-dreamer Will advances from a mystically Awakened state through passive and active Purgation, the ecstasy of Illumination into the Dark Night of the Soul. Piers, the dynamic plowman-guide, passes from the

Illuminative Way in the Visio to Union and Deification in the Vita. Piers of the Vita is Christ's representative on earth and is one who can lead Will, the folke, and Conscience toward inclusive and exclusive mystical Union on earth.

Conscience progresses from his exclusive knowledge of Truth in the first dream to the point where he becomes an interpreter of Truth and a guide for the dreamer, as well as protector and defender of the Christian folke in Unity. At the conclusion of the poem, Conscience becomes truly Awakened to mankind's immediate need for Truth and begins his pilgrimage in search of Piers. Although the folke of the field fail to be mystically Awakened during the scope of the poem, their mystical Conversion is forecast by Conscience's final search for Piers; for, when Conscience finds Piers, there is reason to believe that all men will be changed into an approximation of perfect manhood in mystical Union with Truth.

Thematically structured and organized by dreams of spiritual revelation, by the dreamer's state of privilege within those dreams and his continuous presence as narrator, by the earthly setting, and by the inclusive and exclusive mystical searches for perfection by Will, the folke, Piers and Conscience, the polyphonic narrative of Piers Plowman progresses steadily throughout the eight successive dream visions. As such, the poem must be viewed as having a definite plan and cohesive development.

A STUDY OF CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM
IN THE B-TEXT OF PIERS LOWMAN

by

Mary Morris Wasson

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Mary Morris Wasson

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Much twentieth-century criticism of Christian mysticism in William Langland's Piers Plowman has tended to fit the mystical meaning of the poem into neat formulae of the manuscript divisions, equating Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest with three various steps or stages in the mystical life. H. W. Wells advanced the theory that Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest are the principal organizing factors in Piers Plowman and pointed out their resemblance to the Active, Contemplative, and Mixed lives set forth by Walter Hilton and various other medieval mystical writers.¹ Neville K. Coghill, following

¹Henry W. Wells, "The Construction of Piers Plowman," PMLA, XLIV (1929), 123-40; and "The Philosophy of Piers Plowman," PMLA, LIII (1938), 339-49. Wells, Coghill, Chambers, Meroney, Gerould, and others have pointed out that the manuscript divisions of Piers Plowman are a Visio, a Vita de Dowel, a Vita de Dobet, and a Vita de Dobest. The actual manuscript divisions of the B text of Langland's poem according to Skeat's publication are as follows:

Incipit Liber de Petro Plowman

Prologus

- [Passus I] Passus Primus de visione.
- [Passus II] Passus secundus de visione, vt supra.
- [Passus III] Passus tertius.
- [Passus IV] Passus quartus de visione, vt supra.
- [Passus V] Passus quintus de visione.
- [Passus VI] Passus Sextus.
- [Passus VII] Passus vij. de visione, vt supra.
- [Passus VIII] Passus octauus de visione Petri

Wells' lead but using different terminology, suggested that Piers in his appearances in the B text embodies each of these lives--the Active "lewed" life of Dowel, the Contemplative "Clerkly" life of Dobet, and the Mixed "Episcopal" life of Dobest.²

R. W. Chambers in Man's Unconquerable Mind³ adopted the more important conclusions of both Wells and Coghill. He accepted Wells' theory of the relevance of the three lives to mystical thought and Coghill's suggestion that Piers embodies each of these lives, but he rejected the strict vocational interpretation Coghill presented.

Following Chambers' study came the first serious

-
- Plowman. Incipit Dowel, Dobet, et Dobest.
 [Passus IX] Passus nous de visione; et primus de Dowel.
 [Passus X] Passus decimus de visione, et secundus de Dowel.
 [Passus XI] Passus xj^{us}.
 [Passus XII] Passus duodecimus.
 [Passus XIII] Passus terciodecimus.
 [Passus XIV (Do-Wel VI)] Passus xiiij^{us}.
 [Passus XV (Prologue to Do-Bet)] Passus xv^{us}: finit Dowel, et incipit Dobet.
 [Passus XVI] Passus xvj^{us}, et primus de Dobet.
 [Passus XVII] Passus xvij^{us}, et secundus de Do-bet.
 [Passus XVIII] Passus xviii^{us}, et tercius de Dobet.
 [Passus XIX] Passus xix^{us}; et explicit Dobet; et incipit Dobest.
 [Passus XX] Passus xx^{us} de visione, et primus de Dobest.

²Nevill K. Coghill, "The Character of Piers Plowman Considered from the B-Text," Medium Aevum, II (1933), 108-35.

³R. W. Chambers, Man's Unconquerable Mind (London, 1939), pp. 102-106, 127-28.

modification in the mystical studies of Piers Plowman. Howard Meroney,⁴ finding the Active, Contemplative, and Mixed lives unsatisfactorily equated to Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, suggested that Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest might be better interpreted by the mystical tradition portraying the purgative, illuminative, and unitive conditions of the soul--a triad which he contended was as common in medieval times as the earlier Active, Contemplative, and Mixed triad. Agreeing with Meroney was A. C. Hamilton, who also stated that the Vita was itself marked by the "well known stages of the mystic way."⁵

In 1949, E. T. Donaldson, accepting Meroney's belief that the initial triad put forth by Wells, Coghill, and Chambers was unsatisfactory, attempted to blend both points of view, claiming that more than one triad was intended in relation to Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest and that one set alone was inadequate.⁶ Likewise, T. P. Dunning in "The Structure of the B-Text of Piers Plowman,"⁷ by clarifying the definition of the "active" life and by pointing out that the

⁴Howard Meroney, "The Life and Death of Longe Wille," ELH, XVII (1950), 1-35.

⁵A. C. Hamilton, "Spenser and Langland," SP, LV (1958), 541.

⁶E. Talbot Donaldson, Piers Plowman: The C Text and Its Poet (New Haven, 1949), pp. 158-98.

⁷T. P. Dunning, "The Structure of the B-Text of Piers Plowman," RES, n.s. VII (1956), 225-37.

active life can be identified with the spiritual life, allowed for the blending of the two traditional triads. John Lawlor in his article "The Imaginative Unity of Piers Plowman" concurred.⁸

S. S. Hussey in his study of Piers Plowman⁹ questioned the historical accuracy of the "three-lives triad" concept held by Wells, Coghill, and Chambers. Hussey demonstrated that Hilton's "three-lives" triad lacks direct correspondence with Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. Furthermore, Hussey demonstrated that the "three-lives" triad is too tenuous "to support itself against the independent weight of an interpretation of the poem."¹⁰ Hussey therefore concluded that Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest are the three degrees of the same thing--a gradual development in the life of the dreamer practicing continually the "good life."

R. W. Frank, too, did not support the limiting categories of the Active, Contemplative, and Mixed lives triad; for, as R. W. Chambers pointed out, they do not fit exactly,¹¹ nor do any other triads explain perfectly the meaning of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. Frank followed in

⁸ John Lawlor, "The Imaginative Unity of Piers Plowman," RES, n.s. VIII (1957), 113-26.

⁹ S. S. Hussey, "Langland, Hilton and the Three Lives," RES, n.s. VII (1956), 132-50.

¹⁰ John F. Adams, "Piers Plowman and the Three Ages of Man," JEGP, LXI (1962), 25-26.

¹¹ Chambers, p. 105.

the steps of Hussey by stating that the organizing principle of the poem is the contribution to man's salvation by each person of the trinity.¹² Frank, like Hussey, contended that there is no connection between the definitions in the Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest sections of the poem and the true meaning of the terms "Dowel," "Dobet," and "Dobest." He concluded that the sections do not lead to separate classification but rather are "divisions of the generic term 'dowel.'"¹³ Frank felt that the three-lives concept has only a general non-definitive relationship to Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest and contended that if Langland had intended them to be corresponding, he would have made that correspondence closer and more consistent.

While Hussey showed the possible invalidity of the view held by Wells, Coghill, and Chambers, John F. Adams contended that the details of Donaldson's interpretation of the mystic process and Frank's proposal based on the trinity are "either too tenuous or not of sufficient significance, or else too much remains left unsaid or overlooked."¹⁴ Adams stressed the view that the "consistent structural element of Piers, . . . is the life of the

¹²R. W. Frank, Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation: An Interpretation of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest (New Haven, 1957), p. 16.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁴Adams, pp. 25-26.

Dreamer himself";¹⁵ and, though he, like Frank, recognized that the structural element of the poem is the dream and not the manuscript divisions, he stated that the key to the Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest triad is the Three Ages of Man: youth, middle age, and old age.

In 1962 Martin W. Bloomfield published his book Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse¹⁶ in order to further his own contention that the subject of the poem does not concern the Dreamer as Adams had said but rather concerned itself with "Christian perfection in its social form."¹⁷ Bloomfield contended that Piers Plowman is a fourteenth-century apocalypse and denied the relation of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest to the three aforementioned triads. Instead, he stated that Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest are relevant to an "older tradition, a monastic one originally, of the states of Christian perfection that entail the Kingdom of God."¹⁸

While there may be connections between Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest and some unknown "older tradition" as well as

¹⁵Adams, p. 41.

¹⁶Martin W. Bloomfield, Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse (New Brunswick, 1962).

¹⁷Ibid., p. 104. While Bloomfield does recognize that Piers Plowman concerns "Christian perfection in its social form," he fails to recognize that there are two types of mysticism operating within the poem at the same time.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 105.

the three previously mentioned triads (the three lives, the three mystic ways, and the three ages of man), Hussey demonstrated that it is a mistake to insist on too close a comparison with any particular doctrine. As he ably pointed out, "neither the triad active, contemplative and mixed lives nor the triad purgative, illuminative and unitive states, nor a combination of the two is completely satisfactory as a definition of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest" ¹⁹ The same holds true for the three-ages-of-man triad and the "unknown" triad referred to by Bloomfield. Warnings of this nature were also given by John Lawlor, E. Talbot Donaldson, T. P. Dunning, R. W. Frank, ²⁰ and Elizabeth Zeeman Salter. ²¹

While John F. Adams presented the belief that the dreams are the structural element of the poem and that Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest have no correspondence to the

¹⁹Hussey, p. 146.

²⁰Lawlor, pp. 113-14; Donaldson, p. 197; Dunning, p. 225; and Frank, p. 2. Frank also stresses that the dream divisions of the poem are the thematic units of Piers Plowman.

²¹Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), "Piers Plowman and the Pilgrimage to Truth," Essays and Studies, n.s. XI (1958), 1, warns that while "there are strong connexions between the allegory of Piers Plowman and the mystical process . . . it is a mistake to insist on close equations with any particular doctrine." As her footnotes concerning the warnings of Dunning, Lawlor, and Donaldson indicate, she is here referring to equations with Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest.

earlier mentioned triads, he failed to recognize the thematic relevance of the dream divisions themselves that Frank pointed out in his book Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation.²²

Gordon Hall Gerould pointed out in "The Structural Integrity of Piers Plowman B" that earlier critics failed to equate Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest with the different triads because they neglected the fact that "Langland used a considerable series of dreams as the framework for his ideas." Gerould contended that the manuscript divisions of the poem designated a Visio, a Vita de Dowel, a Vita de Dobet, and a Vita de Dobest but that this "does not represent quite accurately the structural organization which Langland adopted." Rather it is the dreams through which the dreamer is conducted that form the structural and thematic organization of the poem. Gerould also pointed out that "these successive dreams occur in due order, and each new dream marks the beginning of a new stage in that long search for divine wisdom."²³

Elizabeth Zeeman Salter, Edward Vasta, and John Burrow

²²Frank, p. 2. Frank states that one cannot put Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest into any particular doctrine of the late fourteenth century. He also stresses that the dreams, not the manuscript divisions of Piers Plowman, are the thematic units of the poem.

²³Gordon Hall Gerould, "The Structural Integrity of Piers Plowman B," SP, XLV (1948), 61-62.

also agreed with Gerould and discounted the value of the manuscript divisions in their mystical readings of Piers Plowman. They demonstrated the structural importance of the dream visions in their analyses of Piers Plowman.²⁴ Yet none were comprehensive in their demonstration of this belief; rather, they applied their contentions to particular aspects of the poem and neglected others. Gerould gave only a general summary study of the different dreams. Salter projected the view that the thematic units of Piers Plowman are the dream visions, but she was cautious in her use of mystical labels;²⁵ she failed to see Piers as a mystical guide throughout the whole poem, and she did not recognize the importance of Conscience and conscience in man's quest for Truth.

Following Salter's studies, John Burrow confirmed the fact that "readers and critics of Langland have made too little of his vision structure."²⁶ Yet, in his study,

²⁴Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), "Piers Plowman and the Pilgrimage to Truth," pp. 1-16; Elizabeth Zeeman Salter, Piers Plowman: An Introduction (Cambridge, Mass., 1962); Edward Vasta, The Spiritual Basis of Piers Plowman (London, 1965); and John Burrow, "The Action of Langland's Second Vision," ELC, XV (1965), 247-68. Frank, p. 2, and Adams, pp. 26-27, also agree that the dreams, not the manuscript divisions of Piers Plowman, are the structural and thematic units of the poem.

²⁵See note 21, p. 7.

²⁶Burrow, p. 247.

he confined himself to Langland's second vision. Edward Vasta, following the lead of Gerould, Salter, and Burrow, indicated that the "individual dream visions mark off stages in Will's development of mystical perfection." Vasta felt that "Langland's goal is indeed the goal of the mystic" and that "Bernard's concepts of humility, Charity and Unity apply to the Vita."²⁷ Vasta also held that Langland, rather than discussing the way to Truth, dramatizes the way to salvation allegorically and, in addition, dramatizes the experimental undertaking of the way. Though these statements may be true, Vasta concentrated only on certain aspects of the poem and neglected to point out how his beliefs applied to the whole scope of the poem such as Piers' state of illumination in the Visio.

As has been shown by this review of mystical studies of Piers Plowman, most interpreters have concentrated either on the manuscript divisions, particular scenes, or significant dreams and have neglected the fact that the whole scope of the poem is a gradual development toward mystical union for Will, the "folke" of the field, Piers, and Conscience. Those who have departed from the use of manuscript divisions and their exact equation with pre-existing mystical triads agree that Piers of the Vita is a mystic, but they have failed to recognize that Piers of the Visio

²⁷Vasta, pp. 26, 13, 15.

is also essentially mystical in his approach to life. Furthermore, none of the aforementioned scholars has recognized that there are two possible types of mysticism operating within the poem at once; moreover, none has yet discussed the importance of Conscience's role in the individual's and society's search for and attainment of mystical Truth and that Conscience interacts with other characters and, like Piers and Will, grows throughout the poem.

The purpose of this thesis is not to reject any previous scholarship that has added to the understanding of the complexity of Piers Plowman but to set forth the possibilities of one particular mystical reading--a reading which views Piers Plowman as a mystical guide²⁸ to mystical salvation through Truth for the "folke" of the pilgrimage, Will the dreamer, and Conscience.²⁹ Piers is a mystical

²⁸In the Visio Piers can be considered a mystical guide representing the first mystic way of Illumination. In the Vita it may be said that Piers represents the Second Mystic Way--the Unitive Life--in which he actually becomes one with Truth.

²⁹Throughout this paper I consider that while Conscience may be the personification of man's inner conscience, Conscience is also a dynamic character in his own right and is the symbol of what man individually and collectively needs in order to achieve mystical union with Truth.

R. W. Frank, "The Art of Reading Medieval Personification-Allegory," ELH, XX (1953), 237-50, has ably pointed out that the purpose of personification-allegory is "primarily designed to make the meaning explicit" (p. 250) and that the meaning of character is expressed in its name and

guide for a mystical pilgrimage rather than a guide toward simple heavenly salvation. In this context simple heavenly salvation may be defined as the saving of man's soul from eternal damnation and its union with God "in Heaven" after death. Salvation is thus achieved through belief in the Trinity, the Church's creeds, the Ten Commandments, repentance of sins, and adherence to the sacraments of the Catholic Church. In contrast, mystical salvation is not just heavenly salvation or union with God after death, but it is the "real earthly supernatural union between the soul,

is very close to the literal in its statement since personified characters "mean what their names say they mean" (p. 243). Conscience therefore must stand for that concept or quality which it names--conscience--and nothing else. The word "conscience" alone can be defined as the faculty (capable of thought, will, design, and perception) of man's abstract sense or man's consciousness (perception) of the goodness or blameworthiness of his own conduct, intentions, and character together with his feeling of obligation to do well. But this definition of the word "conscience" alone does not completely define the role of the personified Conscience in Piers Plowman. In order to do that, one must "find the pattern of relationship and activity" in which the "personification is placed" (p. 245).

As a character separated from man, as an abstract quality, Conscience of Passus III intuitively knows within himself the way to Truth which neither Will nor the folke know. Thus Conscience, representing that abstract quality of conscience, is not initially at work among the people. Yet throughout the poem there is a shifting in Conscience's realm of activity. He grows in his responses and responsibility to Will and the folke; and, as he does so, he enables the conscience of Will and the folke to grow toward the mystically awakened state.

Thus, while Conscience may be the personification of man's inner conscience, he is also a dynamic character in his own right and is the symbol of what man individually and collectively needs in order to achieve mystical union with Truth.

with its powers of knowledge and love, and God."³⁰ It is the direct communion with God on earth achieved through the Grace of God, not only by adhering to the sacraments of the Church, the Church's creeds, and the Ten Commandments but also by submitting to the absolute love of God and to His Will.

Moreover, it is my conviction that the poem is both individually mystical and apocalyptically mystical and that this dual application is necessary in reading the poem as an organized whole. It is individually mystical in the tradition of Hilton as seen in Will's and Piers' search for perfection and mystical union with Truth achieved by turning away from earthly reality toward a higher reality. At the same time it is apocalyptically mystical in the folke's and Conscience's search for Truth that seeks to transform man into some approximation of perfect manhood through the mystical conversion of all mankind.

In this reading of Piers Plowman, I will try to substantiate the validity of a mystical interpretation of the B text of Langland's Piers the Plowman³¹ and show afresh

³⁰David Knowles, The English Mystical Tradition (New York, 1961), p. 21.

³¹The text of the poem used throughout this thesis is that of W. W. Skeat, The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman in Three Parallel Texts (Oxford, 1886). I accept the evidence presented by George Kane, Piers Plowman: The Evidence for Authorship (London, 1965), and by Skeat,

how such an interpretation reveals the artistic unity of the whole poem--that it has a "definite plan, a consecutive and well linked development."³²

More likely than not, the reader gets the impression from a first reading of Piers Plowman that the poem merely rambles from episode to episode, or from dream to dream, with little sense of direction. But closer examination shows that the poem is a unified whole using an "interwoven" or "polyphonic" narrative technique that may be compared to Ovid's Metamorphoses. C. S. Lewis claims that the polyphonic narrative technique "dominated European fiction both in prose and verse from the thirteenth to the seventeenth

pp. xxvii-xxxii, that William Langland is the author of the A, B, and C-texts of Piers Plowman. The B-text has been chosen for the basis of this study because, as a comparison with the A and C-texts reveals, it is in many ways superior. The A-text, consisting of a Prologue and twelve books, is briefer than the B-text. The A-text, moreover, ends without a conclusion and with the dreamer's rejection by Learning and Scripture. As Wells points out in "The Philosophy of Piers Plowman," p. 339, the B-text explains and clarifies certain ideas which appear confusing in the A-text. While the major lines of thought in the B and C-texts are much the same, as is pointed out by Wells, p. 339, the C-text, according to Skeat, p. xiv, is "on the whole . . . inferior to the B-text in general vigor and compactness."

³²George Winchester Stone, Jr., "An Interpretation of the A-Text of 'Piers Plowman,'" PMLA, LIII (1938), 657. Although Stone is here discussing the unity of the A-text, much of what he says and much of his quoted reference to Dorothy L. Owen also applies to the B-text. See also Gerould, p. 62.

century," as exemplified by Malory in the fifteenth century and by Spenser in the seventeenth century.³³ This technique, also evident in Piers Plowman, is similar to that used in composing the musical fugue since it introduces several musical or poetic themes and various plot sequences and weaves them into a unified whole. In Piers Plowman these various ideas--the stated pilgrimages by different characters, the changing role of Piers, the seemingly digressive, didactic, and dramatic scenes which give apocalyptical prophecies or contrast good and evil--are welded together by several unifying devices such as the continuing presence of the Dreamer, the inspired dreamlike method of progression, and the earthly setting of the poem. In addition to giving the poem structural and thematic unity, these show that the poem is mystical and that it concerns the search for mystical Truth on earth by the poet-dreamer Will, the folke of the field, Piers, and Conscience.

The various quests by different characters--Will's desire to "save his soul," his search for Truth, Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, Charity, and then Piers; the folke's search for Truth without a guide and their eventual search for Truth in Piers' half acre; Piers' search for Union with Truth following the tearing of the Pardon; and Conscience's

³³C. S. Lewis, "Edmund Spenser," Major British Writers, ed. G. B. Harrison (New York, 1954), I, 97.

search for Piers at the conclusion of the poem--all present the theme of the search for Truth or mystical perfection. The method of these pilgrimages is not linear but allegorically dramatic. It is demonstrated by a presentation of contrasting dreams which seem at first to have no relation to the search for mystical truth but which are in fact dramatic devices working toward a common goal. An example of this is seen in Will's vision of Lady Meed immediately after his discussion with Lady Holy Church. Other examples --such as Piers' mystical way of life in contrast to the folke of the pilgrimage and the contrast of Clergy to Patience as pointed out by Conscience, as well as the Passion and Harrowing of Hell contrasted to the Founding of Holy Church and the blessings of Grace and the coming of Antichrist--are not digressive but are dramatic scenes welded together by the presence of Will, the dreams, and the dream content.

The first of these unifying devices is the continuing presence of the poet-dreamer Will either as an observer or participant within his dream visions and his individual development through the Mystic Way. The entire "polyphonic" narrative is presented through the central intelligence of the poet-dreamer Will.³⁴ However, though his dreams

³⁴For a more detailed discussion of Will's role in Piers Plowman, see Jay Martin, "Will as Fool and Wanderer in Piers Plowman," TSL, III (1962), 537-41.

themselves may be considered "divinely inspired visions," his comments upon them cannot; for, as a limited intelligence and as he admits in the text (Passus VII, ll. 143-44; and Passus XIII, ll. 1-4), he does not necessarily understand immediately all that he has seen or experienced.³⁵ The second device is the poem's dream-like method of progression, a common medieval literary form. This structurally organizes the poem³⁶ and has "the aspect of divinely inspired visions whose truthfulness is beyond question."³⁷ The third is the earthly point of reference from which the dream poem departs and with which it is concerned throughout the poem--the "fair felde, ful of folke," Will, Piers, and Conscience and their pilgrimages to Truth on earth.

In Piers Plowman Will is conducted through ten successive dream visions--two of which are deeper dreams within dreams. These indicate the special state of privilege that is enjoyed by the dreamer and that the visions themselves

³⁵Wells, "The Philosophy of Piers Plowman," p. 344, agrees, saying that "the dreamer is always pictured as less enlightened than his spiritual teachers and as frequently fallible."

³⁶Gerould, p. 61, notes, "Though the fact has been rather neglected that Langland used a considerable series of dreams as the framework for his ideas," they do not represent "quite accurately the structural organization which Langland adopted."

³⁷Martin, p. 540.

are a special type of mystical revelation. These dream visions also serve as the basic structural device of the poem³⁸ and as the framework for Langland's ideas³⁹ in that they "mark off stages in Will's development"⁴⁰ in his pilgrimage toward Truth. Will is either an observer or a participant within his dreams, and he reports to the reader not only what he himself experiences or learns in his individual search for perfection but also the progress of Piers, the folke, and Conscience in their individual and social pilgrimages. In this way structural "unity is provided through the central intelligence of the dreamer, in much the same way that Christian forms the center of Pilgrim's Progress."⁴¹

The importance and significance of Will's dream visions in relation to medieval mysticism and the search for Truth by Will, the folke, Piers, and Conscience have been ably pointed out by Edward Vasta and Elizabeth Zeeman Salter. Vasta correctly states that if Will did not fall asleep again and again, he would not have made any progress in his search for Truth and that "if he did not fall asleep at the beginning of the poem, nothing at all would have happened to him."⁴² This fact is explained by Mrs. Salter:

³⁸Burrow, p. 247

⁴¹Adams, p. 26.

³⁹Gerould, p. 61.

⁴²Vasta, p. 28.

⁴⁰Vasta, p. 26.

In many Mediaeval dream poems, sleep represents a state of privilege to which the dreamer would not normally, in waking life, attain. In Piers Plowman it has added force: it represents a state of grace akin to the spiritual "sleep" into which the contemplative is admitted so that he may receive illumination⁴³

Elsewhere she explains that Langland wanted to "establish within the dream the possibility [and the acceptability] of a different order of naturalness in a world, directly and miraculously, subject to the workings of the divine will."⁴⁴ She feels that the "dream-within-a-dream marks an attempt by the dreamer to come closer to grips with his inner self" in his search for Truth. "It marks a deeper inquiry--one that is more personal and private, and one that is significantly mystical."⁴⁵

These observations are substantiated by an examination of the text; for, when the poet falls to sleep in line 9 of the Prologue, he himself indicates that his dream is more than an ordinary type of dream:

I slombred in a slepyng . it sweyued so merye
 Thanne gan I to meten . a merueilleuse sweuene.
 (Prologue, 9-10)

Moreover, at the conclusion of his first dream, the dreamer

⁴³Salter, Piers Plowman: An Introduction, p. 61.

⁴⁴Elizabeth Zeeman Salter and Derek Pearsall, Piers Plowman (London, 1967), p. 38. Though the A-text is being discussed in this book, it is applicable to the B-text as well.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 40.

expresses his disappointment that he has not seen more in his dream (II, 4). Throughout the poem Will often falls asleep while engaged in some religious activity, dreams of the divine, or falls asleep by the grace of God--all of which indicate that Langland is using sleep as a metaphor for spiritual activity.

Will begins his second dream while he is engaged in religious activity and is allowed to see "moche more":

And sat softly adown . and seide my bileue,
And so I babeled on my bedes . thei brouȝte me a-slepe.
And thanne saw I moche more . than I bifore tolde.
(V, 7-9)

He continues to learn until he is awakened by the noise of the Priest's argument with Piers in Passus VII (l. 139).

In the third dream Will continues to emphasize the miraculous, magical, or joyful apprehension of the dream vision:

Murthe of her mouthes . made me there to slepe;
The merueillousest meteles . mette me thanne
That euer dremed wyȝte . in worlde, as I wene.
(VIII, 67-69)

Will again speaks of the miraculous in his dream-within-a-dream in Passus XI:

And in a wynkyng wratth . wex I aslepe
A merueillouse meteles . mette me thanne
That I was rauissed riȝt there . and Fortune me fette,
And in-to the londe of Longynge . allone she me brouȝte
And in a myroure that hiȝt Mydlerd . she mad me to
biholde.
Sitthen she sayde to me . 'here myȝtow se wondres,
And knowe that thow coueytest . and come ther-to, par
aunter.' (XI, 4-10)

In addition to noting Will's joyful description of

this first dream-within-a-dream, it is also necessary to recognize that here Langland is using this deeper type of sleep as an "index of change and significance. . . . This second falling asleep is an unmistakable sign of a new direction in argument and procedure. The dreamer is in need of new direction." Therefore, this dream can be said to signify "that his inquiry has shifted to a deeper and more personal plane."⁴⁶ At the conclusion of this first deeper dream, Will regrets that he has not learned more:

Tho cauȝte I coloure anon . and comsed to ben
aschamed,
And awaked ther-with; . wo was me thanne
That I in meteles ne myȝte . more haue yknowen.
(XI, 395-97)

Perhaps this is one reason why he is anxious to return to sleep after the conclusion of the third dream.

Will's reference in Passus XII that he is asleep by the Grace of God or by the Will of Christ indicates that his sleep is spiritual and mystical:

and atte laste I slepte,
And, as Cryste wolde, there come Conscience . to
conforte me that tyme. (XIII, 21-22)

Will refers to Christ again at the beginning of the fifth dream while he is dreaming of one of Christ's Creatures, Anima. He begs to hear of the love of Christ:

Tyl Resoun hadde reuthe on me . and rokked me aslepe,
Tyl I seigh, as it sorcerye were . a sotyl thinge
with-al,

⁴⁶Salter and Pearsall, pp. 39-40.

One with-uten tonge and teeth . tolde my whyder I
 shulde,
 And wher-of I cam and of what kynde; . I coniuured
 hym atte laste,
 If he were Crystes creature . for Crystes loue me
 to tellen. (XV, 11-15)

The dream-within-a-dream of the fifth dream also centers around Christ. That Will makes another deeper stage of inquiry is indicated when the dreamer is allowed to see Piers Plowman, who has earlier been equated with Christ, and the Tree of Charity:

'Piers the Plowman!' quod I tho . and al for pure
 loye
 That I herde nempne his name . anone I swouned after,
 And laye longe in a lone dreme . and atte laste me
 thougte,
 That Pieres the Plowman . al the place me shewed,
 And bad me toten on the tree . on toppe and on rote.
 (XVI, 18-22)

Will's reported statement of his wife following this dream (XVIII, 427-29) indicates that he has indeed learned from his deeper dream. He has come to some understanding of God's purpose, and he is at one with its meaning.⁴⁷

In the seventh dream Will again dreams of Piers, the divine representative of God, and about the founding of Holy Church. He falls to sleep during the middle of Mass:

In myddes of the masse . tho men jede to offrynge,
 I fel eftsones a-slepe . and sodeynly me mette,
 That Pieres the Plowman (XIX, 4-6)

In Passus XX (ll. 50-52) Will dreams a wonderful dream of prophecy. At the closing of Passus XX the dream boundary

⁴⁷Salter and Pearsall, p. 41.

of spiritual revelation is closed and shuts out the "potential field of revelation"⁴⁸ within which Grace was able to operate freely. The last line of the poem states, "And sitthe he gradde after grace . 'til I gan awake."

The poet's emphasis on the miraculous, magical, or joyful apprehension of the dreams coupled with his visions of Piers-Christ and his own statement that he is asleep by the Grace of God indicate that these visions are a "definite type of dream writing."⁴⁹ They reinforce the thesis that Langland used the "sleep" metaphor to "indicate spiritual activity"⁵⁰ in much the same way that it was used in the contemporary dream poem Pearl. Also supporting Langland's use of the visions to indicate spiritual revelation is this statement in Job 33:15-17:

In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumbering upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth them in slumber

Walter Hilton, an English mystical writer and one of Langland's contemporaries, expresses the importance of "sleep" in the mystic's search for Illumination and Union:

. . . Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat. I sleep and my heart waketh. . . . The more I sleep from outward things, the more wakeful am I in knowing of Jhesu

⁴⁸Salter and Pearsall, p. 38.

⁴⁹Chambers, p. 98.

⁵⁰Salter, Piers Plowman: An Introduction, p. 61.

and of inward things. I may not wake to Jhesu,
but if I sleep to the world. . . . This sleeping
and this waking love worketh through the light
of grace in the soul of the lover of Jhesu.⁵¹

Thus, though Will's spiritual slumber may not be identical with that of the Pearl poet or Walter Hilton, it is similar in that it is an invitation to special knowledge and understanding and that it is through the dream visions that Will learns and grows to understand that Truth does dwell within his heart. The dream visions themselves not only give the poem structural unity but also indicate the privileged and receptive status of the dreamer and the special type of mystical revelation that is being revealed to the dreamer. Through these visions the dreamer Will is allowed to experience and learn and grow within himself and to view the mystical growth of Piers, Conscience, and the folke.⁵²

Langland's starting point is in the world of men,

⁵¹From The Scale of Perfection, ed. E. Underhill (London, 1923), Bk. II, Chap. 40, as quoted in Salter, Piers Plowman: An Introduction, p. 61.

⁵²Salter, Piers Plowman: An Introduction, p. 62, states, "The dreamer in Piers learns many things during sleep, ranging the whole area of the spiritual life; much of what he has to be taught has long been understood by those for whom St. Bernard and Hilton write. But he does come through the dream to comprehend, if not experience, a great mystery, and the dream unifies the whole poem in a specially powerful way."

and throughout he "remains within the real world of suffering and sinful men and women."⁵³ This is seen by the continuous presence of people of this earth: the "fair felde ful of folke" of the Prologue and Passus II-IV, the pilgrims of Passus V-VII,⁵⁴ and the "Christian" folke of Passus XIX-XX.⁵⁵ As Skeat observes,⁵⁶ these inspired dream visions concern the men and things of this earth and as such indicate that the search for Truth by Will, the folke, Piers, and Conscience is not one to be accomplished after death but a mystical one that will be accomplished on earth.⁵⁷ Moreover, the whole poem portrays man's desire

⁵³John Lawlor, "Piers Plowman: The Pardon Reconsidered," MLQ, XLV (1950), 458. Gerould, p. 62, also agrees.

⁵⁴According to Burrow, p. 50, the pilgrims of Passus V-VII should be "identified with the 'felde ful of folke' of the Prologue." Note also that Hawkyn of Passus XII-XIV, the Active man with his coat of sins, his contrition, and his confession, is also reminiscent of and a member of the "felde ful of folke."

⁵⁵Piers and Conscience, a faculty of man on earth, must also be considered as being of this earth. Piers of the Visio is an actual plowman of the earth as well as being a plowman of men; in the Vita Piers is again referred to as a plowman of earthly men. Conscience in the Visio is very much concerned with the establishment of law on earth for man and predicts a time when there will be Truth on earth for all mankind. In the Vita Conscience gathers the Christian folke within the earthly church, and at the end of the poem he represents all mankind in his earthly search for Piers/Truth.

⁵⁶Skeat, pp. lvi-lvii.

⁵⁷Hussey, p. 143, notes that "the final pilgrimage of Conscience in search of Piers apparently takes place on this earth."

for a visionary ideal kingdom on earth,⁵⁸ a type of mystical "Christianity of this earth, as long as life and body endure,"⁵⁹ which the conclusion of the poem optimistically forecasts. While the poem is concerned with the "pilgrimage of the human soul on earth,"⁶⁰ it is also socially oriented⁶¹ and "apocalyptic in its view of perfection."⁶² Even the basic agricultural imagery "together

⁵⁸Geoffrey Ashe, The Quest for Arthur's Britain (New York, 1968), p. 17, points out that Malory, "like other medieval Englishmen--such as Langland of Piers Plowman... believes that each social order has a duty of its own, a proper path of fulfillment and salvation. His implied message to the corrupt English nobility is not to retreat into the cloister, but to turn from knighthood as it is to knighthood as it was meant to be and, under King Arthur, occasionally was." Similarly, Langland's message may be not to retreat into the cloister but for all mankind to strive actively for Union with Truth on earth--not to live as they are, but as they should and could in Union with Truth.

⁵⁹Meroney, p. 35. Note also that Piers Plowman was written in the vernacular of the English people, which indicates that Langland may have believed that all men, and not just the educated clergy, were capable of achieving some type of mystical Union with God.

⁶⁰Lawlor, "Pardon," p. 458, quotes R. W. Chambers as having said this but does not give a reference.

⁶¹Agreeing with this are Dunning, p. 226; Bloomfield, p. 105; and also Gerould, p. 62, who states that Langland is dealing with "man in a world of men."

⁶²Bloomfield, pp. 105-106. It also must be here noted that this is the major contention of Bloomfield's study.

The poem is individually mystical in the tradition of Hilton as exemplified by Will's and Piers' search for perfection and mystical Union with Truth achieved by turning away from earthly reality toward a higher reality. It is apocalyptically mystical as seen in the folke's and

with the other important classes of images in the poem, such as food and clothing, reinforce the apocalyptic point"⁶³ that the poem concerns things of this earth and a search for perfection on this earth.

Henry W. Wells also believes that Piers Plowman deals with things of this earth and not the after-life. To illustrate this point, he contrasts Langland's purpose to Dante's:

We are introduced to the Field of Folk because the poet begins his teaching not with revelation nor with religion but with nature. So he begins later in his Vita de Do-Well and at the conclusion of that section of the poem assures us that even Saracens in substance know the first Person of the Trinity. Moreover Piers Plowman, unlike the poems by Dante and Milton, contains no scene in heaven. Once only and for the space of but three hundred lines the scene sinks to the deep dungeon and dark from which Christ rescues our forefathers in darkness. With the exception of the Harrowing of Hell the poet avoids all scenes that belong to another life than that of this world. In short, the scene of Piers Plowman is precisely the opposite of that of Dante's poem. The Italian poet deals only with life beyond

Conscience's search for truth that seeks to transform man into some approximation of perfect manhood through mystical conversion. This will not be achieved by denying the world but by transforming it. Before mankind is to be transformed, according to the Apocalypse, there is an expectation of an immanent cosmic cataclysm in which God may destroy the ruling powers of evil and raise the righteous to life in a messianic kingdom where man is in mystical union with God. In Piers Plowman the prophetic statements of Conscience (III), Reason (V), Anima (XV), Grace (XIX), and the visions of the coming of Antichrist (XX) all suggest such apocalyptic views. These two aspects of mysticism, the apocalyptic and the individual, differ mainly in that one is concerned with the individual and his way to God and the other with society and its way to union with God.

⁶³Bloomfield, pp. 105-106.

the grave, the English poet only with life upon this side of the grave. The whole poem deals in this sense with the Field of Folk. Its author or authors contrived most vividly and forcefully to state an initial proposition. The work remains in this respect at least remarkably true to its premises. Even from an aesthetic standpoint it holds faithful to this field and to this earth. Its varied imagery always breathes earth-odors.⁶⁴

The poem, beginning and ending with people of this world within Will's dream visions, is basically concerned with a search for Salvation and Truth on earth. It should be seen as a search that will be accomplished on earth.⁶⁵ Thus, in the sense that Will reports to the reader not only what he himself experiences or learns in his individual search for mystical perfection but also the experiences and mystical progress of Piers (in his individual search and in his attempts to help mankind), and the search of all mankind by the folke of the Visio and Conscience of the Vita, it can be said that the poem often operates on more than one mystical level.⁶⁶ The poem cannot be said

⁶⁴Wells, "The Construction," p. 129.

⁶⁵Wells, "The Construction," p. 129, agrees with this statement.

⁶⁶An example of the poem operating on one mystical level is seen when Will is a participant with Lady Holy Church in the Visio or with one of his faculties in the Vita. It operates on two levels when, during his passive purgation, the mystically "Awakened" Will views the unawakened folke in their search for Truth before they find Piers in the Visio and when Will is in Illumination and is able to view

to be just about Will, Piers, Conscience, or the folke; rather, it is concerned with each of them and the need for mystical Truth on earth by all, individually and collectively.⁶⁷

the Deified Piers in the Vita. It operates on three mystical levels during the Visio when Will, in passive purgation, views Piers, in Illumination, guiding the "unawakened" folke on the half-acre; and in the Vita when Will is going through the Dark Night of the Soul, when the folke are still unawakened, and when Conscience is awakened to the need of Piers to save mankind and begins his search.

⁶⁷Gerould, p. 61, agrees, saying, "It is the allegorized history of a human being who grows in knowledge of his own fallibility as well as of the weakness and sins of his fellow men, but who grows also through his experience into a deeper and deeper knowledge of God's love. It is a personal story only in so far as the dreamer reports what he has learned and how he has acquired his wisdom, for he is neither self-centered nor too greatly concerned with his own destiny. To rouse men to seek the truth and live by it is his single purpose."

CHAPTER II

MYSTICISM

Whereas many critics have properly suggested that there are mystical elements in Piers Plowman,¹ most have failed to recognize that the whole scope of the poem "shows us the search for mystical Truth on earth and the growth of a simple mystic religion among the people."² "This mystic

¹See Chapter I.

²G. G. Coulton, The Medieval Scene (Cambridge, 1965), p. 162. Coulton makes this statement as a conclusion of his chapter on Popular Religion during the Middle Ages. He also states that "the mystic has been admirably defined by Dr. McTaggart as one who feels a greater unity in the Universe than that which is recognised in ordinary experience, and who believes that he can become conscious of this unity in some more direct way than in that of ordinary discursive thought" (pp. 153-54). Coulton also says that Langland "steadily trusts the larger hope" (p. 159), that "he is sure of a few fundamental things. Truth is paramount, Truth is God Almighty" (p. 160), and that the "author's personal religion is proof against all shocks of disillusion and disappointment; he is 'one of those rare thinkers who fight fiercely for moderate ideas, and employ all the resources of a fiery soul in support of common sense' (Jusserand). Christ reigns still; if His fold is thus taken by storm, then let us shake the dust of it from our feet and go forth as solitary pilgrims, 'as wide as all the world lasteth,' in search of the Christ that is to be: [here Coulton quotes the conclusion of Piers Plowman]

"The whole book, supported as it is by multitudinous indications from elsewhere, shows us the growth of a simple mystic religion among the people. And this, side by side with the well-known Renaissance of learning among scholars, nobles and merchants, with a general and growing impatience

faith embodied in the figure of Piers" is the basis of Langland's "hope for mankind's salvation";³ and, as such, I believe that Piers, the dynamic mystical guide who progresses from the Illuminative Way in the Visio to Union and Deification in the Vita, is "the symbol of humanity's quest for the way of Salvation."⁴

Mysticism can be defined as the doctrine or belief that a direct and immediate intuition or knowledge of God is attainable by His special grace through insight or spiritual experience "arrived at through the embrace of unifying love."⁵ It differs from ordinary sense perception or the use of logical reasoning. As the author of The Cloud of Unknowing explains, "God is incomprehensible by knowing, but not by loving." He can be approached only by "the endless marvelous miracle of Love"; and "only by love may He be gotten and holden; but by thought never."⁶

of moral abuses, and with concurrent economic causes, worked for the change from the medieval to the modern mind" (pp. 162-63).

³Robert Worth Frank, Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation (New Haven, 1957), p. 94.

⁴Gordon Hall Gerould, "The Structural Integrity of Piers Plowman B," SP, XLV (1948), 67.

⁵T. Corbishley, "Mysticism," New Catholic Encyclopedia (New York, 1967), X, 175.

⁶Rufus M. Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism: The Friends of God in the Fourteenth Century (New York, 1939), p. 221, quoting from The Cloud of Unknowing, Chaps. IV, VI.

The goal of the mystic is the quest in this life for "the real supernatural union between the soul, with its powers of knowledge and love, and God."⁷ Such is the quest of Will the dreamer in Piers Plowman, as are the quests of the folke, Piers, and Conscience. In this quest the mystic must search for "God himself and none of his goods," with "seemly recklessness."⁸

This knowledge of God is reached by "sincere submission to those who represent God . . . by a pure and honest heart which seeks God in simplicity, and combats all the duplicity and false cleverness of self-interest, as fast as he finds them."⁹ Yet this knowledge of God is attainable only through His grace. It is not by the effort of the mystic himself that he attains knowledge of God but by grace through which "God produces in [him] a knowledge and love that exceeds all that can be felt or expressed by the faculties, although it is experienced by the Soul."¹⁰ The Cloud author describes the growth of the divine in man through grace: "Our soule, bi vertewe of this reformyng grace, is mad

⁷David Knowles, The English Mystical Tradition (New York, 1961), p. 21.

⁸Jones, p. 221.

⁹Francois de Salignac De La Mothe Fenelon, Christian Perfection, trans. Mildred Whitney Stillman (New York, 1947), pp. 3-4.

¹⁰Corbishley, p. 177.

sufficient at the fulle to comprehende all him by loue.
 . . . the eendles merueillous miracle of loue, which schal
 neuer take eende."¹¹

The Roman Catholic Church, the established religion of England during the fourteenth century, holds that mysticism is the "intimate union of the soul with God" and that "mysticism represents that relation of man to God, whereby God operates directly in the soul, on the one hand, and the soul turns directly to and is united to God on the other hand."¹² God is at once transcendent (outside the human soul where union with Him is achieved through a series of steps or stages) and immanent (dwelling within the soul where God is discovered by penetrating deeper into the inner self).¹³ The belief in the mystical "Transcendent Light" and the belief in "Inward Love" do not contradict one another but rather complete each other:

They form, when taken together, an almost perfect definition of that Godhead which is the object of the mystic's desire: the Divine Love which, immanent in the soul, spurs on that soul to union with the

¹¹The Cloud of Unknowing, ed. P. Hogson, EETS, O.S., 218, 1958, pp. 18-19, as quoted in Elizabeth Zeeman Salter, Piers Plowman: An Introduction (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 84.

¹²Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia: New Testament (New York, 1959), p. 453.

¹³For a detailed explanation of the concepts of transcendent and immanent, see Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness, 4th ed. (New York, 1961), pp. 97-99.

transcendent and Absolute Light--at once the source, the goal, the life of created things.¹⁴

From the Middle Ages, the question of whether the mystical life is available to all men has been debated, and that debate has not been settled. George M. Sauvage states that true mystical contemplation in this present life is available to only a few souls through a very special grace of God.¹⁵ Yet in the New Catholic Encyclopedia Corbishley expresses a different viewpoint:

There has been much debate whether the full mystical experience is possible for all men or whether it is open only to those of certain temperament. Dom Cuthbert Butler, a recognized authority, argued that the traditional Christian view, which had been lost to sight during the 18th and 19th centuries, is that all men are called to a specifically mystical way of knowing and loving God. In favor of this view

¹⁴Underhill, pp. 103-104. Miss Underhill also explains that the mystic's "experience involves at least a twofold apprehension. (a) That Holy Spirit within, that Divine Life by which his own life is transfused and upheld, and of which he becomes increasingly conscious as his education proceeds. (b) That Transcendent Spirit without, the 'Absolute,' towards union with which the indwelling and increasingly dominant spirit of love presses the developing soul. In his ecstasy, it seems to the mystic that these two experiences of God become one. But in the attempt to philosophize on his experiences he is bound to separate them. Over and over again the mystics and their critics acknowledge, explicitly or implicitly, the necessity of this discrimination for human thought" (p. 108).

See also Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism. Jones quotes Hilton as believing the same thing: that the "soul has an 'eye' by which we may 'know the sovereign truth and may learn to love the sovereign goodness which is God'" (p. 227). Jones' own definition of mysticism also reinforces Miss Underhill's (p. 210).

¹⁵Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia: New Testament, p. 665.

he quoted Bishop John Hedley, who argued that contemplation is the chief act of the heart of man, for the heart flowers in the act of charity, and contemplation is charity that is actual, pure and flowering under the movement of the Holy Spirit. It differs from ordinary prayer, yet is not extraordinary in the sense that humble souls cannot aspire to it. It is not a miraculous activity, but is simply the perfection of supernatural prayer, ordinarily given by God to those who remove obstacles to it and avail themselves of the requisite means¹⁶

Corbishley reinforces his opinion by pointing to R. Garrigou-Lagrange's belief that there is only one unitive way, "not of its nature extraordinary, to which, by docility to the Holy Spirit, generous souls are led to perfection."¹⁷

There is no conclusive "proof" that William Langland believed that the mystical experience was open to all men. Yet that Langland believed it is strongly suggested not only by the pilgrimages taken in search for Truth by Will, the

¹⁶Corbishley, p. 176. Corbishley concludes this paragraph: "Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that because of a lack of proper guidance or because of other unfavorable circumstances, or because particular individuals are strongly inclined to exterior activities, some generous souls may not arrive at the mystic life during the span of an ordinary lifetime. This, however, Garrigou-Lagrange considered to be accidental.

"Accidental or not, Abbot Butler recognized the situation to be so common that, through no fault of the individual concerned, the circumstances of life may, and often do render the experience of mystical union all but impossible. He cited St. Gregory's complaint that by becoming pope he had lost the gift of contemplation he had enjoyed in the monastery, and concluded there was much to be said for the view that there are not one or two 'unitive ways' but many, just as there are many mansions in our Father's house" (p. 176).

¹⁷Corbishley, p. 176.

folke, Piers, and Conscience but also by the apocalyptical forecasts given by Conscience (III), Reason (V), Clergy (X), Grace (XIX), and the visions of the coming of Antichrist (XX).¹⁸ My treatment in this study of mysticism and Piers Plowman is based on the view that mysticism is a practical program for all men and that the aim of "every life should be union with God, actual deification to the point of sharing the Divine Life."¹⁹ The Roman Catholic mystics shared this view that man's destiny is to enter "creatively into the life of the Trinity, the love that circulates incessantly among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." They believed that this goal should be a part of every true Christian's life: "For only as we advance towards increasing participation in the Trinity are we able to love God with our whole heart and soul and mind, and our neighbors as ourselves."²⁰ Thus I believe that in Piers Plowman the mystical graces are "open to everyone and it is incumbent upon each to make of his life a pilgrimage toward glory."²¹

¹⁸W. A. Pantin, The English Church in the Fourteenth Century (Cambridge, 1955), p. 262, also states that the fourteenth-century mystics wrote in the vernacular of the lay people in order to reach them. Langland did so. I infer that he did because he felt that the mystical experience was open to all people.

¹⁹Huston Smith, The Religions of Man (New York, 1958), p. 342.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

As explained in the initial definition of mysticism, the mystical states are attainable only through the grace of God. Even so, those who are blessed do not automatically experience union with God since man exists in a state of original sin and "the consciousness of God that would seem to be connatural to man, has become fitful and obscure."²² Thus, in order to be united with God, there must be a deliberate effort to turn away from the world of everyday experience to concentrate on the eternal reality of God in a re-education of Love.

In the growth of the soul toward Union with God, one may posit five steps which in "the inward experience of every soul on her way to union with the Absolute resembles the spiritual and historical life of Christ."²³ The five general stages of Langland's "scale of perfection" are (1) Awakening of the Self to Consciousness of Divine Reality or Mystical Conversion, (2) Search for Self-Knowledge and Purgation, (3) Illumination, (4) Surrender

²²Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia, p. 177.

²³Underhill, pp. 121-22. Though there are as many different "spiritual ladders" as there are individual mystics, I have chosen to follow Miss Underhill's five-step process throughout this paper because it seems to be more pertinent to Piers Plowman than the others. Similar information can be found in Rufus M. Jones, Studies in Mystical Religion (London, 1919), p. 340; and in De La Mothe Felenon's Christian Perfection, pp. 196-97.

of the Self or the "Dark Night of the Soul," and (5) Union.²⁴ All of these stages apply generally to Piers Plowman and to other medieval mystical writings, but it is necessary to maintain a certain flexibility of mind when evaluating and comparing the individual literary implementations of the five stages of the "scale of perfection." Each mystic differs in his approach:

No one mystic can be discovered in whom all the observed characteristics of transcendental consciousness are resumed, and who can on that account be treated as typical. Mental states which are distinct and mutually exclusive in one case, exist simultaneously in another. In some, stages which

²⁴These stages are listed and briefly discussed in Underhill, pp. 167-75. Underhill also points out that there are two mystical lives. One is called the "first mystic life" or the Illuminative Way, which includes stages one, two, and three; the "second mystic life" is the Unitive Way, and it includes stages four and five (p. 381).

J. Aumann, "Mystical Phenomena," New Catholic Encyclopedia (New York, 1967), X, 172, lists a similar set of steps: "The following are the principal and concomitant mystical phenomena, from the beginning to the end of the mystical state: (1) An intuition of God or divine things, as distinct from discursive knowledge, with a profound penetration of divine mysteries; (2) An experimental or quasi-experimental knowledge of God or divine things. This is the essential phenomenon of the mystical life and is usually accompanied by spiritual joy, interior absorption in God, disdain for worldly pleasures, and a desire for greater perfection . . . ; (3) Passive purification of the senses, which presupposes the active purgations of senses and spirit . . . ; (4) Continued awareness of the presence of God, accompanied by "sleep" or suspension of the faculties, filial fear of God, love of suffering, divine touches, spiritual sensations, flights of the spirit leading to ecstasy, wounds of love, and interior communications . . . ; (5) Passive purification of the spirit . . . ; (6) Total death to self, heroism in the practice of virtue, joy in persecution, zeal for the salvation of souls, and relative confirmation in grace."

have been regarded as essential are entirely omitted: in others, their order appears to be reversed.²⁵

Mystical Conversion, the first breaking-in of the suprasensible upon the soul and the awakening of man's

²⁵Underhill, pp. 167-68. Corbishley agrees with Underhill: "One of the problems raised by much mystical literature is that far too many authors seem anxious to achieve a basic classification of states, into which, like some bed of Procrustes, the diversified experiences of a whole host of highly individualized personalities must be made to fit. The all but infinite variety of physiological conditions, intellectual endowments, social background, educational equipment, and the like, render it unlikely a priori that the way to God will be precisely the same even for any two persons, let alone for a whole mass of people. It seems desirable, therefore, to maintain flexibility of mind in trying to evaluate the accounts that different mystics give of their experiences, even while we recognize that, as the fundamental qualities of human nature remain unchanged, so there is likely to be a rough parallelism between any two sets of experience" (p. 176).

Miss Underhill herself also states: "The true mystic--the person with a genius for God--hardly needs a map himself. He steers a compass course across the 'vast and stormy sea of the divine.' It is characteristic of his intellectual humility, however, that he is commonly willing to use the map of the community in which he finds himself, when it comes to showing other people the route which he has pursued. Sometimes these maps have been adequate. More, they have elucidated the obscure wanderings of the explorer; helped him; given him landmarks; worked out right. Time after time he puts his finger on some spot--some great hill of vision, some city of the soul--and says with conviction, 'Here have I been.' At other times the maps have embarrassed him, have refused to fit in with his description. Then he has tried, as Boehme did and after him Blake, to make new ones. Such maps are often wild in drawing, because good draughtsmanship does not necessarily go with a talent for exploration. Departing from the usual convention, they are hard--sometimes impossible--to understand. As a result, the orthodox have been forced to regard their makers as madmen or heretics: when they were really only practical men struggling to disclose great matters by imperfect means" (p. 104).

mystical consciousness, is usually precipitated by a disequilibrium of the self. This disturbance of the equilibrium or change in the level of man's consciousness results in a shifting of man's field of perception from a lower to a higher level. This awakening can be either gradual or sudden, but it usually at some point "involves a sudden and acute realization of a splendor and adorable reality in the world . . . never before perceived."²⁶

First, the mystic apprehends a splendor outside himself which is an expansive vision of the world and the vague knowledge of what is beyond. For instance, in Piers Plowman the poet-dreamer Will falls into a vision and immediately dreams what he calls a "merveilleuse" dream. In this dream he views a world which is out of the ordinary and which gives him a view of true reality. In his vision of Lady Church, Will views the splendor of her holiness and gets a glimpse of the mystical world that is opened up to him; and at the conclusion of this dream, Will is disappointed that he did not see and learn more.

If the mystical conversion is to be completed, there must also be an emergence of the egocentric self from "the prison of the I-hood," and the willful and dedicated

²⁶Underhill, p. 178. Miss Underhill discusses in detail the "Awakening of the Self" (pp. 176-97). Throughout my discussion of Mystical Conversion, I rely on the information given by Underhill.

concentration of the self's growth in love and self-knowledge as the complement of the initial act of expansion. The awakening of the self is to a higher and more active plane of apprehension with a new and more personal relationship with the reality of God that demands more and more spiritual activity on the part of the mystic. Evelyn Underhill says that Mystical Conversion

. . . must pass beyond the stage of metaphysical rapture of fluid splendour, and crystallize into a willed response to the Reality perceived; a definite and personal relation must be set up between the self and the Absolute Life. To be a spectator is not enough. The awakened subject is not merely to perceive transcendent life, but to participate therein; and for this, a drastic and costly life-changing is required.²⁷

In Piers Plowman I believe that Will and Conscience experience Mystical Conversion during the poem. The dreamer begins his Mystical Conversion at the opening of his first dream, and this state can be said to continue through his meeting with Lady Holy Church. An attempt is made by Reason, Repentance, and Piers to "awaken" the folke of the pilgrimage to the true mystical life in the Visio, but the folke, without Conscience, are not converted at this time; their conversion is forecast by Conscience's recognition of their needs at the conclusion of the poem. Conscience of the Visio is seen as an abstract faculty who possesses an individualistic natural knowledge of Truth,

²⁷Underhill, p. 195.

but as one who does not truly "awaken" in man or "awaken" to the need for all men to search for and achieve union with God on earth until the time of disequilibrium during the attack of Antichrist on Unity in the Vita.

Once the soul has awakened to the transcendent and immanent presence of God, it attempts to eliminate all that stands in the way of its progress toward Union with Him through Purgation and self-knowledge. This second stage is one of initiation for those beginners who desire to withdraw from vice and turn toward virtue and who want to rid themselves of all the elements of imperfection, false desires, error, and sin that are not in harmony with transcendent and immanent reality. While the mystical life is a perpetual process of continual purification, when it is considered as a specific stage, it is the

. . . rather slow and painful completion of Conversion. It is the drastic turning of the self from the unreal to the real life: a setting of her house in order, and orientation of the mind to Truth. Its business is the getting rid, first of self-love; and secondly of all those foolish interests in which the surface-consciousness is steeped.²⁸

Yet, in order to cleanse one's self, one must know one's self, for self-knowledge is the first step toward knowing God.²⁹ During Purgation there is a torment of

²⁸Underhill, p. 204. Underhill discusses the Purification of the Self on pages 198-231.

²⁹William Yeomans, "St. Bernard of Clairvaux,"

contrition of the heart and an acute consciousness of one's unworthiness. There is the purgation of the senses and ridding the self of superfluous, unreal, and harmful desires. There is also the perfecting of the soul in Poverty, Chastity, Obedience, the death of the lower nature of the soul, its selfhood, and the beginning of the self-surrender of the soul to God.³⁰

In Piers Plowman Will's search for self-knowledge begins with his questioning of Lady Holy Church. It continues through his passive purgation in the Visio, during which he gains an understanding of and learns to avoid sin and falsehood as represented in the visions of Lady Meed and the pilgrims' confessions and avowals of repentance. Also during his passive Purgation he is shown the true reality of the mystic in Illumination through the personage of Piers Plowman of the Visio. Will's Purgation and search for self-knowledge become active in the Vita de Dowel where he comes to know himself as he experiences repentance, obedience, humility, and poverty through his visions of Thought, Intelligence, Study, Learning, Scripture, Good Faith, Nature, Imagination, Conscience, and Patience. At

Spirituality through the Centuries; Ascetics and Mystics of the Western World, ed. James Walsh (New York, 1964), p. 115. Underhill, p. 200, also discusses this.

³⁰ Information presented in this paragraph was gathered from general reading and from Underhill, pp. 198-231.

the end of his Purgation in Passus XV, Anima acts as an illuminating influence on Will, giving him the final preparation for his mystical Illumination-Contemplation stage in Passus XVI-XIX.

When the self has acquired knowledge of itself through meditation and the discipline of self-analysis, has detached itself from things of the senses, and has "acquired those virtues which are the 'ornaments of the spiritual marriage,' its joyful consciousness of the Transcendent Order returns in an enhanced form."³¹ This Illumination includes in itself "many of the stages of contemplation,"³² [recollection],³³ 'degrees of orison,'

³¹Underhill, p. 169. Underhill discusses Illumination in particular on pages 232-65, and topics related to it on pages 266-79.

³²Underhill defines and discusses Contemplation in the following ways: "Contemplation . . . establishes communion between the soul and the Absolute by way of these complementary modes of apprehending that which is One. A. The usually uncontrollable, definitely outgoing, ecstatic experience; the attainment of Pure Being, or 'flight to God.' B. The more controllable ingoing experience; the breaking down of the barrier between the surface-self and those deeper levels of personality where God is met and known 'in our nothingness,' and a mysterious fusion of divine and human life takes place" (p. 304). Contemplation is "self-forgetting attentiveness, a profound concentration, a self-merging, which operates a real communion between the seer and the seen . . ." (p. 300). She also explains that the Object of Contemplation is always some aspect of the Infinite Life --Goodness, Truth, Beauty--and that the two marks of the real condition of Contemplation are (1) the "Totality and Givenness of the Object" (the fact that the Absolute is revealed to the mystic) and (2) "Self-mergence of the subject" (giving of the self wholly to the Absolute). (p. 332)

³³"Recollection" is defined by Underhill, p. 312, as the

visions³⁴ and adventures of the soul [like those] described by St. Teresa and other mystical writers."³⁵

The mystic's contemplation of the Absolute allows for his progress in attaining Divine Love. It is a state marked by splendor and intensity. The joy in Illumination is passionate as a result of the mystic's consciousness of direct communication with God or "another intelligence which purports to be divine"³⁶ and of his apprehension of the exalted life of humility, surrender, and intimate, intense love.³⁷

Throughout the Visio Piers Plowman can be said to be in a state of Illumination. Piers knows the way to God, who in the poem is called Truth, and can describe the way

"deliberate consideration of and dwelling upon some one aspect of Reality--an aspect most usually chosen from amongst the religious beliefs of the self" So for the Christian mystic it would be Scripture and incidents in the life of Christ.

³⁴Underhill, p. 229, explains that mystical visions are "often the way in which the mystical consciousness presents its discoveries to the surface-mind." I believe that this is the significance of Will's dream-visions in Piers Plowman.

³⁵Ibid., p. 169.

³⁶Ibid., p. 241.

³⁷Ibid., p. 236. Underhill defines Rapture as being "the conviction of a final and unforgettable knowledge" (p. 376). She also states that the mystic's "rapture or ecstasy includes a moment--often a very short, and always an indescribable moment--in which he enjoys a supreme knowledge of or participation in Divine Reality" (p. 369).

to the pilgrims because he himself has been there. Like St. Bonaventure, Piers does not refuse acts of charity in helping the pilgrims "on the ground of giving more time to prayer," nor is he so "intent upon guarding his own peace and recollection as to shirk the correction and training of his subjects."³⁸

Langland's Will experiences what might be termed the stage of Illumination in Passus XVI-Passus XIX. Following Will's "vision of insight" through Anima in Passus XV, he is prepared for a higher means of perceiving reality. When Will faints with sheer joy into a deeper dream on hearing the name of Piers Plowman, who in the Vita is in Union with Truth, he can be said to be surrendering himself to God in perfect love and to be in the ecstasy of communion with Truth through Piers. Throughout his illuminating Period of Expansion (the Tree of Charity; his visions of Faith, Hope, and Charity; the Passion and Harrowing of Hell; and the Founding of Holy Church) he receives directly or indirectly the transcendent love of Truth, and in turn he himself grows in immanent love.

These various forms and grades of Illumination always seem final to the mystic, but while the soul has a sense

³⁸ Anselma Brennell, "St. Bonaventure," Spirituality through the Centuries; Ascetics and Mystics of the Western World, ed. James Walsh (New York, 1964), p. 178.

of the presence of God, Illumination cannot give final satisfaction to the spiritual consciousness. Final satisfaction can occur only during the last climactic mystical stage of Union through Deification and Spiritual Marriage. Although Illumination is the "'contemplative state' par excellence," it is only a step toward Union. It forms with the two previous stages the "first mystic life," which many mystics never go beyond: "Illumination brings a certain apprehension of the Absolute, a sense of Divine Presence: but not true union with it. It is a state of happiness."³⁹

Following this joy of Illumination comes the crisis which marks the transition from the "first mystic life," or Illuminative Way to the "second mystic life," or Unitive Way. This crisis is referred to as the "Dark Night of the Soul," and it is often a period of utter blankness and stagnation as far as mystical activity is concerned. During this "Dark Night" the mystic is in a state of disharmony and is aware not only of his weaknesses and imperfection in contrast to the Absolute which he has perceived during Illumination but also that he is separated from God. It may be explained that this state is just the complementary negative consciousness which naturally intervenes between the Illuminative and the Unitive Life. Nonetheless, it is a deeply human process "in which the self which thought

³⁹Underhill, p. 169.

itself so spiritual, so firmly established upon the super-sensual plane, is forced to turn back, to leave the Light, and pick up those qualities which it had left behind."⁴⁰

The "Dark Night" is the most terrible of all the experiences of the Mystic Way; yet, it is the way in which the mystic achieves the final and complete purification of the Self that is necessary before Union is possible.

In Piers Plowman Piers may be said to go through the "Dark Night of the Soul" beginning with line 116 of Passus VII when he tears the "paper" on which the pardon was written and then vows that "Of preyers and of penaunce my plow shal ben hereafter" (VII, 119). His "Dark Night" continues during his absence from the poem in the Vita to the point where Clergy quotes Piers as saying that Love

⁴⁰Underhill, p. 388. Underhill discusses the "Dark Night of the Soul" on pages 380-412. Much of my discussion is based on this information.

Underhill also explains that the "Dark Night of the Soul" occurs because "the consciousness which had, in Illumination, sunned itself in the sense of the Divine Presence, now suffers under an equally intense sense of Divine Absence: learning to dissociate the personal satisfaction of mystical vision from the reality of mystical life. As in Purgation the senses were cleansed and humbled, and the energies and interests of the Self were concentrated upon transcendental things: so now the purifying process is extended to the very centre of I-hood, the will. The human instinct for personal happiness must be killed. This is the 'spiritual crucifixion' so often described by the mystics: the great desolation in which the soul seems abandoned by the Divine. The Self now surrenders itself, its individuality, and its will, completely. It desires nothing, asks nothing, is utterly passive, and is thus prepared for 'Union'" (p. 388).

is the only true science (XIII, 124).

The poet-dreamer Will experiences the "Dark Night of the Soul" following his Illumination during Passus XX, "The Coming of Antichrist." It is also in this Passus that Conscience perceives an "awakening" of mankind's immediate need for Truth, and as such it is also a personal "Dark Night" for him. While neither Will nor Conscience passes from the "Dark Night" into mystical Union as Piers does, that Union is forecast by Conscience's determination to find Piers (who is then in Union with Truth) at the conclusion of the poem.

Following the "Dark Night of the Soul" in which the soul has completely surrendered itself--its individuality and its will--the mystic passes into the Union stage in which he is truly one with the Will of God. In this stage God is not merely perceived and enjoyed as in Illumination but is actually one with the mystic.⁴¹ The mystic in Union

⁴¹ Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York, 1955), p. 166, points out that Bernard believed that "the union of man with God is in no way comparable to that of the Son with the Father, which is not a union, but unity itself." According to Corbishley, p. 178, in this stage of the mystical experience "there is a complete coordination of both intellect and will, directed toward God, who is the perfect and adequate end of their activity." The effect of this mystical contemplation is "chiefly a deepening of the whole personality, an enriching of character, a development of virtue."

Underhill discusses the Unitive Life on pages 413-43, which I refer to during my discussion.

not only believes in the presence of God within and without but also feels that God is united with his soul; it is a conscious "mystical surrender to God in perfect love--the dying of self in an ecstasy of communion with God."⁴² It is a perfect and permanent establishment of a new life upon the transcendent levels of higher reality, described through the terms "Mystical Marriage" and "Deification." Such is the state of Piers Plowman from Passus XV to the conclusion of the poem.

Deification, the corollary of the Incarnation and the humanizing of God in Christ, is defined as "the utter transmutation of the self in God."⁴³ Likewise, Mystical Marriage can be defined as the consummation of the soul's intimate and personal communion with God in a perfect and permanent form. In the Mystical Marriage "there is a complete transformation of the soul into the Beloved. God gives Himself to the soul and the soul gives itself to God in a certain consummation of divine love, so that the soul shares in God's life as fully as is possible in this life."⁴⁴ While there is Union, the soul does not lose

⁴²Salter, p. 69.

⁴³Underhill, p. 415.

⁴⁴N. Lohkamp. "Mystical Union," New Catholic Encyclopedia (New York, 1967), X, 174. A. A. Bialas, "Mystical Marriage," New Catholic Encyclopedia, X, 170, says that the Mystical Marriage is the "human soul living intimately

its identity. The soul of man only imitates God. It still retains its personal identity, but in its imitation of God man's soul does share in God's life as much as is possible on earth:⁴⁵ "This union is more or less permanent; the soul is more conscious than ever of the Blessed Trinity. The soul is absorbed in seeking the honor of God, eagerly desiring to undertake anything or suffer anything that God may will."⁴⁶

The capital marks of the state of mystical Union itself are as follows:

(1) a complete absorption in the interests of the Infinite, under whatever mode It is apprehended by the self; (2) a consciousness of sharing Its strength, acting by Its authority, which results in a complete sense of freedom, an invulnerable serenity, and usually urges the self to some form of heroic effort or creative activity; (3) the establishment of the self as a "power for life," a centre of energy, an actual parent of spiritual vitality in other men.⁴⁷

This vitality expresses itself often through action; for,

united to God through grace and love." He gives a complete discussion of this on pages 170-71.

⁴⁵The Trinity is a unity. It is Three-in-One. Union differs in that it is a joining of two separate entities together as a marriage. Through His Incarnation, Christ, in unity with God and the Holy Spirit, became "as one" in union with Mankind. Because of the union of Divinity with humanity in Jesus Christ and as a result of Christ's "death," Grace was bestowed on mankind, enabling him to achieve mystical union with the unity of the Trinity.

⁴⁶Lohkamp, p. 174.

⁴⁷Underhill, p. 416.

as Yeoman explains, Bernard's "active life depended upon his life of prayer and is a manifestation of his fidelity to his vocation. He is a man of action [practicing selfless charity] because he is a Mystic."⁴⁸ Such is the activity of Piers Plowman in the Vita.⁴⁹

The reader learns that Piers Plowman has passed from the "Dark Night of the Soul" into Union in Passus XIII where Clergy states:

For one Pieres the Ploughman . hath inpugned vs alle,
And sette alle sciences at a soppe . saue loue one,
And no tixte ne taketh . to meyntene his cause,
But dilige deum . and domine, quis habitabit, &c.
And seith that Dowel and Dobet . aren two infinites,
Whiche infinites, with a feith . fynden oute Dobest,
Which shal saue mannes soule . thus seith Piers the
Ploughman. (XIII, 123-29)⁵⁰

⁴⁸Yeomans, p. 119.

⁴⁹For other discussions of mystics in the action of practicing "selfless charity," see the discussion concerning St. Paul's ministry, Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia, p. 453; and also Rufus Jones's remarks about Hilton, Studies in Mystical Religion, p. 339: "He is no merely passive mystic, satisfied with contemplation, and for ever engaged in hunting for the 'lost groat' within the dark of his own soul. He calls the Christian to a life of 'busy rest' and energetic love, which loves every man, 'be he ever so sinful,' for in comparison with love, he says, 'there is not great excellence in watching and fasting till thy head aches, nor in running to Rome or Jerusalem with bare feet!'"

⁵⁰It may be here argued that Piers does not reach a state of Mystical Marriage with Christ until Anima associates Piers with Christ; but, as Gerould, p. 67, points out, Patience is initially identified with Piers in the C text, XVI, 34. Patience's subsequent speech, XVI, 138-50, indicates Piers' deeper understanding. Thus the C text verifies that Piers has transformed since his departure from the poem in the Visio.

The second indication that Piers has reached the Unitive state is given by Anima when he relates that "Piers the Plowman . Petrus, id est, Christus" (XV, 206).⁵¹ From this point on, the search for Truth/Christ (or Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest) becomes synonymous with a search for Piers; for, as Piers is deified through his Mystical Marriage to Truth, he is also one with the will and purpose of Truth. Thus, when Will has visions of Piers in the Vita, he is experiencing an Illuminating vision of a representative of Truth; and when Conscience sets out in search of Piers at the end of the poem, it must be understood that he is in fact searching for Truth/Christ, or the perfect priesthood that would bring Truth to earth.

In addition to the five stages of the mystical life, there are certain characteristics peculiar to the fourteenth-century English mystics that also apply to Langland's work: "In the first place we find among English mystics a very strong, intimate and affectionate concentration on and

⁵¹This statement is missing from the C-text. E. Talbot Donaldson, Piers Plowman: The C Text and Its Poet (New Haven, 1949), p. 195, explains that, although the phrase is absent, Langland's alterations at this point were prompted more by extreme caution rather than by a radical change of attitude. Thus, the B-text, as Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), "Piers Plowman and the Pilgrimage to Truth," Essays and Studies, n.s. XI (1958), 12, views it, "stands consistent, although audacious, in its main approach."

devotion to the Person of Christ,"⁵² in which "devotion is concentrated, with an intensity of personal feeling and tenderness, more and more on the Person of Christ, and particularly on His Passion and on the Holy name."⁵³ In Langland's world this aspect is seen in Will's search for Piers and his visions concerning the Tree of Charity, Faith, Hope, Charity, the Passion and Harrowing of Hell, and the Founding of Holy Church. It is also a part of Conscience's instruction about Piers/Christ to Will in Passus XIX and his own determined search for Piers/Christ in the conclusion of the poem.

Second, there is anti-intellectualism present in their writing in reaction against the excessive intellectualism of the schools. In Piers Plowman this anti-intellectualism is seen not only in the stress put on the "kynde knowing" philosophy of Lady Church, Conscience, and Anima, but also in Will's experiences with Thought, Intelligence, Study, Learning, Scripture, Good Faith, Nature, Imagination, and Patience from whom he learns the rightful place of knowledge in the search for Truth--that it is not supreme, that one learns to know truth through Love and

⁵²Pantin, p. 251.

⁵³Ibid., p. 190. The following discussion of the fourteenth-century English mystics is based on Pantin's discussion, pp. 190-92, 251-53.

not through intellectual knowledge alone.⁵⁴

A third characteristic of fourteenth-century English mystical writings is the individualism of each writer in his approach to Illumination and Union and the individual stress of different beliefs.⁵⁵ The fourth characteristic is that the English mystics of the fourteenth century wrote in the vernacular of the lay people and used English in their writings where Latin had previously been used. This indicates that their writings were meant for devout lay people as well as clerics.⁵⁶ One other important characteristic, relevant to most of the religious and mystical literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, is the dominant or underlying theme of penance.⁵⁷ In Piers

⁵⁴While, as Pantin suggests, this point could be argued interminably, especially regarding Piers Plowman, I believe that my reading of the poem supports this assertion.

⁵⁵See my text, pages 56-61. No two mystics believed in exactly the same thing; each stressed something different.

⁵⁶Pantin, p. 253. J. F. Goodridge, ed., Piers the Ploughman (Baltimore, 1959), p. 10, notes that there were a large number of Piers Plowman manuscripts made during the Middle Ages and that it "was very much a 'living' text in its day, being widely read throughout the fifteenth century and well into the sixteenth." The various manuscripts number forty-five.

⁵⁷The three parts of penance--Contrition, Confession, and Reparation (also called Restitution, or the act of Satisfaction)--and the importance of the latter in Piers Plowman are discussed by Neville Coghill, "Introduction," The Vision of Piers Plowman, by Henry W. Wells (New York, 1935), p. xx; Coghill, The Pardon of Piers Plowman, Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture, Proceedings of the British Academy, XXXI (London, n.d.), 31, 54; Frank, pp. 101, 105; and Skeat, II, 268.

Plowman the importance of sincere penance and redde quod debes is shown by their being the basis for receiving a pardon from Truth. These last three characteristics of fourteenth-century English mystical writings apply to Langland's work just as the first two characteristics do. Piers Plowman was written in the vernacular of the layman; the parts of penance are discussed at various times within the poem as the basis for Truth's pardon; and Langland's approach and stresses are individualistic.

Yet, while Langland's mystical approach is no doubt individualistic, there are specific doctrines of belief held by other medieval mystical writers that are to be found in Langland's Piers Plowman. Jusserand points out that it would have "been possible for Langland to become acquainted with the works of earlier mystics,"⁵⁸ and it is interesting to note the similarities. Like Saint Paul, Langland expressed the belief "that Christ is the way to God and that living union with Christ denotes the fundamental experience of piety and perfection."⁵⁹

From Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Langland may have learned the importance of the principle of self-knowledge.

⁵⁸J. J. Jusserand, Piers Plowman: A Contribution to the History of English Mysticism (New York, 1965), p. 195.

⁵⁹Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia, p. 453.

Bernard felt that "self knowledge is the beginning of the road back to the Father."⁶⁰ He felt that the road to the Father was also through Christ, who said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Bernard also believed in the active charity of mystics; for, as Piers demonstrates in the Visio, "the more the soul is filled with divine charity, the more it is capable and desirous of sharing in the work of redemption, to be done in the body and on

⁶⁰Yeomans, p. 116. Gilson, p. 167, reports that William of Saint Thierry believed in a science of love, as did St. Bernard, but "it differs from Saint Bernard's in the more important role the Augustinian doctrine of memory plays in it. The love of God has been naturally inserted by him into the heart of his creature. Human love should therefore tend naturally toward God in virtue of its own weight, but original sin turns it aside and the aim of monastic life is to bring the love of man back to his creator. The method to follow in order to achieve this result requires first an effort to know oneself. The soul knows itself by knowing itself as created in the image of God to the extent that it is a mind (mens). In mind itself is found a sort of secret point where God has, so to speak, left his imprint so that we may always remember him. Like Saint Augustine, let us call this innermost recess of the mind 'memory.' We shall then say that our secret 'memory' corresponding to the Father, reason to the Word and will to the Holy Ghost. Born of a memory which itself is but the stamp of God upon man, this reason and this will should have no other object than God. The effect of divine grace is to straighten out the faculties of the soul disordered by sin, so that the love with which we love God shall coincide with the love he has for himself in himself and with which he loves himself in us. The more the soul recovers its resemblance to God which belongs to it by right of birth, and which it should never have lost, the better it knows God by knowing itself: the resemblance of the soul to God constitutes its knowledge of God." In this sense, Langland's mysticism is similar to that of both Bernard and Thierry.

earth."⁶¹

Saint Bonaventure believed, like Langland, that the gift of knowledge of one's self and of God was important. But he insisted on the right use of knowledge and argued in favor of "kynde knowing" rather than intellectual knowledge.⁶² And, as is seen in the perfection of Piers in the Visio, Langland, like Saint Bonaventure, believed that "the perfection of a religious man is to do common things in a perfect manner."⁶³ In Langland's mysticism there is nothing shadowy or merely poetic, just as in the mysticism of Saint Bonaventure. Langland's mysticism, as well as Bonaventure's, is

. . . raised upon a solid foundation of dogmatic and moral theology. The theological virtues, the virtues and gifts of the Holy Ghost, the divine indwelling of God in the soul by grace are his great subjects. Christ crucified is the way to the Blessed Trinity, and all the practices of the Christian life, above all prayer, careful avoidance of sin, examination of conscience, mortification, frequent Confession and Communion, devotion to the Blessed Sacraments and to Our Lady, must find their due place in the rule of life of anyone sincerely striving after holiness.⁶⁴

Some of Langland's mysticism also bears a resemblance to that of Angela of Foligno, who was proclaimed a saint in 1309. She believed strongly in contrition, penance, and self-knowledge; she preached humility, poverty, and the

⁶¹Yeomans, p. 118.

⁶²Brennell, p. 174.

⁶³Ibid., p. 180.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 174.

necessity of the will of man being united with the will of God;⁶⁵ and, like Piers of the Visio, Angela of Foligno "never sought a completely solitary life." Though she was "not of the world . . . she lived right down in the mess and muddle of it. She went about the country-side, she did the household chores."⁶⁶ In fact, Miss Stafford quotes Le Livre de Brenheureuse Soeur Angèle Foligno (p.163) in explaining that "speaking or eating or doing any other kind of thing never prevented her from being lifted up in soul and spirit."⁶⁷ The same is true for Langland's exemplar, Piers Plowman, except for his experience during the "Dark Night of the Soul."

Whereas some of Langland's mystical beliefs are similar to those held by other fourteenth-century mystics, his mysticism was not just concentrated upon the mystical life for the individual: "His ideal was a moral and spiritual society rather than just the achievement of untroubled contemplation of God."⁶⁸ The poem is individually mystical in the tradition of Hilton as exemplified by

⁶⁵Ann Stafford, "Angela of Faligno," Spirituality through the Centuries: Ascetics and Mystics of the Western World, ed. James Walsh (New York, 1964), pp. 195, 192-93.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 190.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 192-93.

⁶⁸Jones, Studies in Mystical Religion, p. 339.

Will's and Piers' search for perfection and mystical union with Truth achieved by turning away from earthly reality toward a higher reality. It is apocalyptically mystical, as seen in the folke's and Conscience's search for Truth that seeks to transform man into some approximation of perfect manhood through Mystical Conversion. This apocalyptic Mystical Conversion will not be achieved by denying the world but by transforming it. However, before mankind is to be transformed, according to the Apocalypse, there is an expectation of an immanent cosmic cataclysm in which God may destroy the ruling powers of evil and raise the righteous to life in a messianic kingdom where man is in mystical union with God. In Piers Plowman the prophetic statements of Conscience (III), Reason (V), Clergy (X), Grace (XIX), and the visions of the coming of Antichrist (XX) give such premonitions. These two aspects of mysticism, the apocalyptical (inclusive) and the individual (exclusive) differ mainly in that one is primarily concerned with the individual's transformation and union with God and the other is primarily concerned with society's transformation and union with God.

In this sense Langland's beliefs are quite similar to those of the German mystics of the fourteenth century. It might even be said that Langland's mysticism is of the same general school as the fourteenth-century German mystics. While neither knew of the other's existence, each

had built similar mystical beliefs upon earlier mystical concepts at approximately the same time. Jusserand points out that there are other similarities. There is a "resemblance of tone as well as subject between these mystics and Langland. But as the language in which most of them wrote precludes all idea of direct imitation, we can only conclude from such resemblances" that they are of the same mystical movement. Moreover, there is between them a strong link, "much stronger indeed than imitation or teaching, namely inherited blood, tendencies, qualities and moods."⁶⁹

One early member of this German mystical family was Saint Hildegard. She forecast the mystical change of society and "'first initiated the great apocalyptic movement in the Middle Ages."⁷⁰ Another member of this fourteenth-century German mystic family was Rulman Merswin, a Strasbourg banker. Merswin's mystical writings included both the inclusive and the exclusive mysticism. According

⁶⁹Jusserand, pp. 202, 212. G. G. Coulton, p. 157, also notes that there was a wave of popular mysticism which began in "Dominican circles on the upper Rhine at the end of the thirteenth century" and was spread "by the trade route to the lower Rhine and England." It "showed, among other manifestations, a strong tendency to escape from the cruel theology This humanitarian effort is noticeable in three of Chaucer's contemporaries, Rulman Merswin of Strassburg, Juliana the anchoress of Norwich, and the author (or authors) of Piers Plowman."

⁷⁰A. Jundt, "Rulman Merswin et l'Ami de Dieu de l'Oberland," Vol. cxcvii of Worke in Migne's Patrologie (Paris, 1890), p. 6, as quoted in Jusserand, p. 206.

to Jusserand, Merswin and the other mystics of this school (including Langland)

. . . have a superhuman ideal of life . . . ; the mystics commune with heavenly powers and with their own souls; they break with the world They indite prophecies in apocalyptic style; they have visions and ecstasies: for most of them [like Will the Dreamer] these visions are their real life, and this life in dream appears to them so far superior to any earthly one that they are irresistibly impelled to write and relate their experiences . . . [they] relate their journeyings through the abstract land of ethics; and, in short, think and act very much like our English dreamer.⁷¹

It is interesting also to note that Merswin's Book of the Nine Rocks, "says his principal commentator, 'may justly be called the mystic apocalypse of the XIV century' That might have been true, . . . had we not the Visions of Piers Plowman."⁷²

As Jusserand correctly affirms, Piers Plowman is the mystical apocalypse of the fourteenth century; yet this does not necessarily mean, as Martin W. Bloomfield suggests,⁷³

⁷¹Jusserand, p. 206.

⁷²Ibid., p. 210.

⁷³Martin W. Bloomfield, Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse (New Brunswick, N.J., 1962), states that "only those [mystics] who stressed individual perfection are true mystics" (p. 91). He claims that the mystics were not fundamentally social thinkers--that they were concerned only with their own individual perfection and union with God. Thus, he concludes that Piers Plowman is not essentially a mystical poem. Yet at the same time he admits that neither the apocalyptic prophet nor the individual mystic "would deny the importance of the other in the total world scheme" (p. 99). He admits that it is only for convenience

that it is not also mystical in the individual sense. Rather, it is mystical both in the individual sense and in the apocalyptic sense,⁷⁴ for a review of the mystical lives of Angela of Foligno, Saint Hildegard, Rulman Merswin, and Saint Bernard, together with Ray C. Petry's study of the late medieval mystics,⁷⁵ reveals that many mystics, like Langland, were socially responsible and were concerned with the transformation of society.

Bloomfield correctly states that "it is certain that neither the [apocalyptic] prophet nor [the individual] mystic would deny the importance of the other in the total world scheme,"⁷⁶ and only for convenience does Bloomfield divide the two.⁷⁷ Yet, Langland is dealing with the "total world scheme" in Piers Plowman, and as a result the poem must be considered mystical in the individual as well

that he divides the two aspects of mysticism--the apocalyptic and the individually mystical (p. 94).

⁷⁴T. F. Dunning, "The Structure of the B-Text of Piers Plowman," RES, n.s. VII (1956), seems to agree. He states that the Vita revolves around the spiritual progress of the individual (pp. 233, 236); yet at the same time he recognizes that "from the beginning, Langland shows that his concern is with the reform of society" (p. 226).

⁷⁵Bloomfield, p. 99, refers to Ray C. Petry, "Social Responsibility of the Late Medieval Mystics," Church History, XXI (1952), 3-19, who defends the "true mystics" against the charge that they had no sense of social responsibility.

⁷⁶Bloomfield, p. 99.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 94.

as the apocalyptic sense as in the Apocalypse and the works of Rulman Merswin and Saint Hildegarde.

The poem is exclusively and individually mystical in the tradition of Hilton, as exemplified by Will's and Piers' search for perfection and mystical Union with Truth achieved by turning away from earthly reality toward a higher reality. It is inclusive and apocalyptically mystical, as seen in the folke's and Conscience's search for Truth that seeks to transform man into some approximation of perfect manhood through mystical conversion.

These two aspects of mysticism, the inclusive-apocalyptic and the exclusive-individual, differ only in that one is concerned with the individual and the other with society. Both are based on the Church's doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation; both are alike in that they are concerned with the transcendent and immanent Love and Grace of God; and both involve a search for absolute Truth on earth. Therefore, in this thesis inclusive-apocalyptic mysticism and exclusive-individual mysticism will be considered together and not as two separate entities. I will deal with both mystical aspects and will show how these two types of Christian mysticism work together and interweave to unify Piers Plowman.

Throughout the remainder of this thesis, the mysticism of the individual will be referred to as "exclusive mysticism," for it is the search of a single individual

who excludes the ordinary world of man in his search for Truth on earth. The aspect of apocalyptic mysticism will be referred to as "inclusive mysticism," for it is the search for Truth which includes all of mankind--all men saved through the Incarnation of Christ--who wish not to turn away from the world but who wish to transform the whole world by achieving the perfection of all mankind on earth.⁷⁸

⁷⁸By the very fact that all men are saved through the Incarnation of Christ, inclusive mysticism can also be referred to as "Incarnational mysticism."

CHAPTER III

THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH IN THE VISIO

The basic theme and recurring pattern throughout the successive dream visions in Piers Plowman is that of the journey or quest for exclusive and inclusive mystical perfection on earth.¹ The more important quests for Truth are undertaken by the poet-dreamer Will, the folke of the pilgrimage, Piers, and Conscience.² Once this pilgrimage

¹Elizabeth Zeeman Salter and Derek Pearsall, Piers Plowman (London, 1967), p. 42, point out that the quest motif is a common medieval literary device. Elizabeth Zeeman Salter, Piers Plowman: An Introduction (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 61, notes that sleep is a metaphor to "indicate spiritual activity."

Throughout this chapter I refer to Will's search for salvation as being a search for mystical earthly salvation rather than simple heavenly salvation. Simple heavenly salvation forecasts the union of man's soul with God only after death; it is achieved by belief in the Church's creeds, the repentance of sins, and adherence to the Church's sacraments. Mystical earthly salvation involves the union of man's soul with God on earth. It is achieved not only by the repentance of sins, adherence to the Church's sacraments, and belief in the Church's creeds but also by following God through a conformity of will, love, the virtues, humility, active charity, self-knowledge, doing well, belief in the Trinity, purging oneself of all falsehood and evil, and by the Grace and Mercy of God. It is a mystical union of God and Man that occurs on earth.

²Ben H. Smith, Jr., Traditional Imagery of Charity in Piers Plowman (New York, 1960), p. 98, agrees that the poem is "largely governed by the motif of the quest." Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), "Piers Plowman and the Pilgrimage to Truth," Essays and Studies, n.s. XI (1958), 2, concurs:

is begun it is never abandoned.³

The theme of the need to seek Truth and thereby mystical perfection is initially established in the first dream after Lady Holy Church has explained the meaning of Will's visions of the Prologue. Lady Holy Church explains that the Tower is the home of Truth who, as the Father of Faith, created all mankind, who has given man five senses, and who would have him obey His will and worship Him while he, man, dwells on earth.

In addition to praising Truth and preaching against Falsehood and Wrong, who live in the Castle of Sorrow in the Dark Abyss, Lady Church stresses the importance of moderation and need--that moderation in all things is the first prerequisite for Christian perfection.⁴ Lady Holy Church explains to Will that "moneye of this molde" (I, 44), i.e., worldly goods, belongs to "Kyng Sesar" and that one renders earthly things to the earthly king (I, 52) but that one must also render God's things to God. She further explains that Rightful Reason and Common Sense, or the

"Pilgrimage to Truth is undertaken by the reader and Poet-dreamer no less than by Piers and his crown of penitent, stumbling pilgrims, and the going is sometimes rough."

³Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), p. 8; S. S. Hussey, "Langland, Hilton and the Three Lives," RES, n.s. VII (1956), 149.

⁴Martin W. Bloomfield, Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse (New Brunswick, N.J., 1962), p. 152.

moral sense of Conscience, must rule man in his use of temporal goods (I, 52-56).⁵

Following this basic instruction, the dreamer kneels before Lady Holy Church

and cryed hir of grace,
And preyed hir pitously . prey for my synnes,
And also kenne me kyndeli . on criste to bileue,
That I miȝte worchen his wille . that wrouȝte me to man;
'Teche me to no tresore . but telle me like ilke,
How I may saue my soule . that seynt art yholden?'
(I, 79-84)

It is important to note that Will beseeches Lady Church to pray for his sins; he wants her to teach him how to believe in Christ and how to do the will of God. He, like other medieval mystics, is searching for "God himself and none of his goods";⁶ he desires no earthly treasure but wants only to know how to save his soul. He asks neither the way to

⁵Bloomfield, p. 152, states, "The speech of Holy Church in Passus I really sets out the 'message' that Langland is bringing to his age and perhaps ours. Because the disordered nature of the poem has been stressed so much, it would perhaps be useful to look at her speech again. She begins by stressing the importance of moderation and need. A proper recognition of need--the right to have clothing and shelter, food and drink, 'in mesurable manere' (v. 19)--is the first prerequisite for Christian perfection. 'Mesure is medcynne . thouȝthow moche ȝerne' (v. 35). How, Will then asks, can possessions be properly divided in this world? The answer, Lady Holy Church says, is to be found in the Bible in Jesus' command to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God that which is God's. 'Rightful reson shulde rewle ȝow alle' (v. 54). One should take possessions only as rightful reason and kind wit dictate for one's need."

⁶Rufus M. Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism: The Friends of God in the Fourteenth Century (New York, 1939), p. 221.

simple heavenly salvation nor for instructions as to how he may get earthly or heavenly treasures--he asks only how he may save his soul⁷ and how he can find the way to mystical perfection. Will's prayers to Lady Holy Church, taken in context with the dream method of progression, the earthly setting, and Lady Church's responses, indicate that he does desire mystical perfection. As Vasta correctly points out, "Lady Church's answer takes accurate account of Will's question and it explains what Will desires to know: the way to perfection."⁸

Lady Church replies that he should search for Truth, that the text she follows to Truth is based on the fact that "God is love." Those who follow a life of truth to Truth are like Christ on earth and in Heaven:

'Whan alle tresores aren tried,' quod she . 'trewthe
is the best;
I do it on deus caritas . to deme the sothe;
It is as derworth a drewery . as dere god hym-seluen
Who-so is trewe of his tonge . and telleth none
other,
And doth the werkis ther-with . and wilneth no man ille,
He is a god bi the gospel . agrounde and aloft,
And ylike to owre lorde . by seynte Lukes wordes.'
(I, 85-91)

She further states that God taught his Archangels to understand Truth by the Holy Trinity and that He required nothing

⁷George Winchester Stone, Jr., "An Interpretation of the A-text of 'Piers Plowman,'" PMLA, LIII (1938), 657, says that this is true for the A-text as well.

⁸Edward Vasta, The Spiritual Basis of Piers Plowman (London, 1965), p. 59.

of them but to obey His will (I, 108-10). She reaffirms that Truth is best and that the biblical texts of "render to Caesar" and "God is love" prove it so:

For-thi I sey as I seide ere . bi siȝte of thise
 textis,
 Whan alle tresores arne ytried . treuthe is the
 beste.
 Lereth it this lewde men . for lettred men it knowen,
 That treuthe is tresore . the triest on erthe.
 (I, 132-35)

Holy Church's reply to Will's original question of how he may save his soul reveals its mystical meaning, for she speaks not of the ordinary means of achieving heavenly salvation (belief in the Church's creed, repentance of sins, and the necessity of the Church's sacraments); instead, she speaks of an immanent and transcendent search for Truth. Lady Holy Church sends Will, not to a shrine, but to living a good life, seeking love and Truth, and avoiding Falsehood; these will lead him to his earthly salvation. Thus, early in Piers Plowman the theme of searching for earthly salvation through love and living well is established. As one critic states, "nothing in Piers Plowman ever contradicts these words; in a very real sense they are final."⁹

Following Lady Holy Church's instructions about Truth, Will tells her that he has no "kynde knowing" (I, 136), no natural gift for understanding Truth, and he requests that she teach him further. He specifically asks

⁹Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), p. 3.

where Truth grows in him and if there is some special faculty in his body where Truth dwells (I, 136-37). To this Lady Church replies that there is a natural knowledge in his heart

that kenneth in thine herte
For to louye thi lorde . leuer than thi-selue;
No dedly synne to do . dey thou³ thow sholdest.
(I, 140-42)¹⁰

She explains that Love is Heaven's sovereign remedy; he who takes it has not a trace of sin left. Love is the first among the company of the Lord in Heaven as mediator between God and man. One can recognize Love by natural instincts, or the immanence of Truth given to man by the Transcendent God:

And for to knowe it [love] kyndely . it comseth by
myght,
And in the herte, there is the heuede . and the heij
welle;
For in kynde knowynge in herte . there a myjte
bigynneth.
And that falleth to the fader . that formed vs alle.
(I, 161-64)

Lady Church also discusses (I, 166-201) the principal virtues necessary to achieve Union with God. These are belief in the Trinity, humility (meekness), and active

¹⁰The fact that natural knowledge dwells in man's heart is again mentioned by Piers in V, 615-25; by Anima in XV, 203-204, 212, and in XVI, 13-16. It is also repeated by Holy Church in I, 161-64. That it is mystical is seen in its similarity to the statement made by the author of The Cloud of Unknowing (as quoted in Elizabeth Zeeman Salter, p. 84) on pages 32-33 of this thesis.

charity--a charity which includes everything contrary to self-love and in its active sense means doing "good works towards one's neighbor."¹¹ She explains that giving is the key that unlocks love and frees the grace of Holy Church--grace which is necessary to attain perfection on earth:

For-thi this wordes . ben wryten in the gospel,
Date et dabitur vobis . for I dele þow alle.
 And that is the lokke of loue . and lateth oute my
 grace. (I, 198-200)

Again she stresses the fact that Love is necessary to gain Truth, the best way to salvation or perfection:

Loue is leche of lyf . and nexte owre lorde selue,
 And also the graith gate . that goth in-to heuene;
 For-thi I sey as I seide . ere by the textis,
 Whan alle tresores ben ytryed . treuthe is the beste,
 (I, 202-205)¹²

The theme of Piers Plowman is explicit in this scene, and the remainder of the poem is a working out in detail of Lady Church's speech. Lady Church has answered Will's question and has given him guidance. She has directed him to follow Truth through the conformity of his will, through love, the virtues, belief in the Trinity, humility, and

¹¹Robert Worth Frank, Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation: An Interpretation of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest (New Haven, Conn., 1957), p. 95, points out that this is mystical and in agreement with traditional Christian mystical beliefs.

¹²Frank, p. 95, notes that there is a "connection between the two parts of Lady Church's sermon: truth is like Truth through a conformity of wills; love unites man to Love, also through a conformity of wills. The fruit is mutual knowledge and love between God and man, which is contemplation and the unitive life."

active charity. She has defined Truth "as it applies to the individual with relation to himself, and as it applies to him in the social structure."¹³ She has explained that Will has within himself a natural knowledge of what to do and how to love; he has but to perceive it. She has told him to

. . . teach others the truth and look to Jesus who provides an example for us all. Share your wealth with others, Chastity without charity is worthless. . . . Faith without works is dead, and "give and it shall be given unto you."¹⁴

But the poet-dreamer Will still does not completely understand the definitions and answers he has received from Lady Church about Truth, Salvation, and Perfection. He therefore "tries to solve his problem by approaching it from another angle."¹⁵ He asks Lady Church to teach him how to avoid Falsehood, which in Passus I she had told him to avoid because Falsehood thwarted love and deceived everyone:

. . . mercy, madame . for Marie loue of heuene,
That bar that blisful barne . that bougte vs on the
rode,
Kenne me by somme crafte . to knowe the Fals.
(II, 2-4)

Will "requires an elaboration and clarification of the

¹³Stone, p. 647.

¹⁴Bloomfield, p. 153.

¹⁵Stone, p. 659.

definition [of the way to Truth]. This is presented first by a series of closely linked object lessons in which he learns what Truth's opposite Falseness is."¹⁶ Lady Church points to Falsehood, the opposite of Truth, and to Lady Meed, the enemy of Lady Church, and contrasts their wickedness (II, 20-27) with the goodness, mercy, and love of Truth, who is her Father. She emphasizes the fact that she, Lady Church, should take precedence over Lady Meed, for through the Church one may gain mercy. He who gains her mercy will be her lord in Heaven, and he who turns to Lady Meed will lose her love and mercy. Lady Church then departs from Will, but before going she admonishes him:

'Knowe him there if thow canst . and kepe thi tonge,
And lakke hem nouȝt, but lat hem worth . til lewte
be iustice.
And haue powere to punyschen hem . thanne put forth
thi resoun.
Now I bikenne the Criste,' quod she . 'and his
clene moder,
And lat no conscience acombren the . for coueitise
of Mede.' (II, 46-50)¹⁷

¹⁶Stone, p. 674. Stone concludes this observation: "This is presented first by a series of closely linked object lessons in which he learns what Truth's opposite Falseness is, and from what he concludes that salvation in the next world depends upon doing well in this" (p. 674). I agree with Stone's position that one can learn what Truth is by understanding its opposite, but I believe he is in error in his conclusion. Will, I contend, learns from his visions of Falsehood that one must do well in order to achieve salvation and perfection on earth--not after death.

¹⁷Note that Lady Church has instructed Will not to become actively involved but to keep silent and remain passive. Therefore, this section of the poem represents

Thus, the subsequent scenes concerning Lady Meed (Passus II-IV) can be seen as an illustration of Falsehood and whose purpose is to further instruct Will in an understanding of Truth:

The soundness of this approach to an understanding of Truth, by an understanding of its opposite, has been demonstrated in literature from Aristotle to Dante, and is manifest today in the upbringing of every child. For almost all children are taught truth by a positive punishment for wrongdoing. There is, apparently, something so much more real and immediately understandable about wrong, and pain, and unhappiness than about definitions of truth, right, and pleasure that Aristotle was forced to define happiness after this negative manner as the absence of pain from the body and trouble from the soul. Dante, before he could understand the goodness and happiness of Paradise, had first to become acquainted with all forms of vice and evil. . . . And so to the dreamer, the poet, of Piers Plowman Falseness is presented not as a definition or as an abstraction but as a moving picture, a concrete development of life in the field before him. Terms, names, and words become living beings.¹⁸

Reinforcing the supposition that Will is shown the Lady Meed episodes to instruct him in an understanding of Truth is the presence of Conscience: "Conscience seems to speak for the poet, as well as for the traditional evangelical teachings of the church."¹⁹ He is an "activity

his passive Purgation of sins. It is only after he has learned from his passive Purgation that he begins actively to cleanse himself, as is seen in the Vita.

¹⁸Stone, p. 659.

¹⁹Edmund Colledge and W. O. Evans, "Piers Plowman,"

of the mind" who mediates "between the practical intellect and the will." His "function is to bring syllogistic evidence of right action from the intellect and the will."²⁰ Conscience is seen as having the "kynde knowing" that was discussed by Lady Church in Passus I. Conscience possesses the natural knowledge written in man's heart which both prompts him to an awareness of "right and wrong in particular situations--and also gives assurance that the moral conflict will one day have an end."²¹

Conscience shows the king that there are two kinds of meed (III, 220-32).²² One is a payment from Truth, a just reward for good works by the grace of God. The other is material, earthly treasure represented by Lady Meed. It is measureless.

Conscience then reviews the state of affairs in law and concludes with an apocalyptic prophecy that natural understanding shall yet come together with Conscience and

Pre-Reformation English Spirituality, ed. James Walsh (London, 1965), p. 123.

²⁰D. W. Robertson, Jr., and B. F. Huppé, Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition (Princeton, N.J., 1951), p. 158.

²¹John Lawlor, Piers Plowman: An Essay in Criticism (London, 1962), p. 30.

²²This discussion refers to Will's statement in Passus I that he wanted no "tresore" of the earth but earthly salvation, and to Lady Holy Church's discussion concerning what to render to Caesar and to God.

make law a laborer²³ so that Love, Truth, and Perfection can arise among all men. He predicts that Reason shall reign supreme and rule nations, and then one Christian King will govern the world. Moreover, natural love and Conscience shall come together and turn law into an honest workman. Then such love shall arise and such peace and perfect truth will be among the people that men will be filled with truth and joy, thinking that the Messiah has come to earth.

Conscience reinforces Lady Church's teachings about obeying the will of God:

god hymself hoteth
The, be boxome at his biddyng . his wille to
fulfille (III, 262-63)

Following this, he makes his prophecy:

I Conscience knowe this . for kynde witt me it
taughte,
That resoun shal regne . and rewmes gouerne;
And riȝte as Agag hadde . happe shul somme.
Samuel shal sleen hym . and Saul shal be blamed,
And Dauld shal be diademed . and daunten hem alle,
And one Cristene kyng . kepen hem alle.
Shal na more Mede . be maistre, as she is nouthe,
Ac loue and lowenesse . and lewte togederes,
Thise shul be maistres on molde . treuthe to saue.
And who-so trespasseth ayein treuthe . or taketh
ayein his wille,
Leute shal don hym lawe . and no lyf elles.
Shal no seriaunt for here seruyse . were a silke
howue,
Ne no pelure in his cloke . for pledyng atte barre.
Mede of mys-doeres . maketh many lordes,

²³"Laborer" here may be an early reference to Piers, who appears as a laborer in the field.

And ouer lordes lawes . reuleth the rewmes.
 Ac kynde loue shal come 3it . and conscience
 togideres,
 And make of lawe a laborere . suche loue shal
 arise,
 And such a pees amonge the peple . and a perfit
 trewthe,
 That Iewes shal wene in here witte . and waxen
 wonder glade,
 That Moises or Messie . be come in-to this erthe,
 And haue wonder in here hertis . that men beth
 so trewe.

.
 Batailles shal non be . ne no man bere wepne,

And er this fortune falle . fynde men shal
 the worste. (III, 282-302, 321, 323)

Conscience here has prophesied the apocalyptic transformation of society, which reinforces Will's mystical aspirations and gives him hope. But Conscience's prophecy is one of the future and will not occur in the Visio.²⁴

²⁴ John Burrow, "The Action of Langland's Second Vision," EIC, XV (1965), 248-49, agrees with me here.

Bloomfield, p. 113, also concurs: "This whole section (II-IV) is fraught with an apocalyptic sense of urgency, and Langland's allegory is centered around the problem of the king, who is a multidimensional symbol but whose majesty can unite the religious, social, and psychological realms, with the social (and political) bearing the main emphasis. The plea is for the transformation of society and the right use of bona temporalia. Lady Meed is exposed, and Conscience and Reason are invited to take their proper places. Conscience and Reason create the necessary circumstances for the awareness of sin, and hence the confession scene in the next section follows logically.

"The last three passus of the Visio are concerned with repentance and absolution, as in the scene of the Confession of the Deadly Sins, in the scene of the planned Pilgrimage to Truth, which is permanently interrupted by the plowing of the half-acre (in the telling of which Langland is enabled to sketch out his ideal society), and finally in the scene of the Tearing of the Pardon, with its repudiation

Although Conscience does instruct and reinforce Will, it is Reason who "becomes the central figure in this section of the Poem."²⁵ It is Reason, not Conscience, who is able to resolve for the king the quarrel between Lady Meed and Conscience; and it is Reason, not Conscience, who retains his influence throughout the rest of the Visio (with respect to the field of folke) and the Vita de Dowel (with respect to Will's search for Truth).

Will continues his passive Purgation and growth in understanding the nature of Truth in his second dream vision. Here he beholds the folke of the field who in the first dream were led to secular law and order on earth by the king and his advisers Reason and Conscience. Now Will sees Reason alone convincing the folke to seek Truth.²⁶ Reason tells them not to make a pilgrimage to the shrines of Saint James or to the saints in Rome but to seek "Seynt

of the pardon by the priest, apparently without Piers' being convinced of its complete worthlessness. The major concern here is with the apocalyptic elements in these wonderful passus with their richness of detail, humor, and élan."

²⁵H. W. Wells, "The Construction of Piers Plowman," PMLA, XLIV (1929), 128. It is significant that Reason is the central figure of the poem at this time, for man cannot reach Truth through Reason alone. Man needs to be ruled by Conscience.

²⁶In the A-text (V) it is Conscience who makes this speech. Yet in the C-text (V, VI) it is Reason. I therefore believe that Langland determined between the writing of the A-text and the B-text that Reason, not Conscience, was the motivation of the folke.

Truthe for he may saue you alle" (V, 58). Reason, here, is not talking about the ordinary type of salvation that one tries to attain by making pilgrimages to the shrines of saints; rather, he is referring to a mystical type of salvation that was discussed by Lady Church in Passus I and by Conscience in Passus III:

'And ~~3e~~ that seke seynte Iames . and seintes of
Rome,
Seketh seynt Truthe . for he may saue þow alle;
Qui cum patre et filio . that feire hem bifalle
That suweth my sermon;' . and thus seyde Resoun.
Thanne ran Repentance . and reherced his teme,
And gert Wille to wepe . water with his eyen.
(V, 57-62)

At the same time it must be recognized that Reason's sermon is "practical" and the folke respond to his good sense. Reason, with the help of Repentance, prescribes spiritual exercise for the folke, for "before they may go on a pilgrimage they must have confession."²⁷ The mass general confession of the folke, which was quite common in the Middle Ages,²⁸ "is prompted by the sermon of Reason who proves that the pestilences were in consequence of sin (V, 15) and for no other reason."²⁹ Thus, these confessions

²⁷Lawlor, p. 45.

²⁸Burrow, p. 249.

²⁹Nevill Coghill, "The Character of Piers Plowman Considered from the B-text," Medium Aevum, II (1933), 115. Burrow, p. 251, believes that Reason's speech "represents what any man's reason will tell him about his duties; and it is this reasoning with oneself, rather than any grand

are made without Conscience, as is indicated by his absence from the poem in the second dream, and without the "kynde knowing" that he could give them. They are made only as the result of the external pressures brought to bear on them by Reason.³⁰ The effect is similar to that of "mob psychology" --all the folke confess, cry for grace, and desire to know the way to Truth.³¹ But these reasonable, practical, and intellectual acts of contrition and confession are inadequate according to the rules of the Catholic Church and Conscience (XVI, 16-21, 87-96; XIX, 177-84). The true "penitent is to be sorry in thought, word, and deed; to feel sorrow, to express it, and to prove it by doing penance or by making restitution." There must be "Contrition of heart, Confession of mouth, and Satisfaction of deed." Any

public preaching, which Langland sees as the beginning of the conversion of the folke of the field." Whether Reason represents man's inner reasoning is debatable, but it is a fact that the pilgrims do not make any transference from using reason to feeling contrition as Burrow suggests.

³⁰ John F. Adams, "Piers Plowman and the Three Ages of Man," JEGP, LXI (1962), 28, points out that Will later (XI) reproaches Reason for failing mankind. He does influence their confessions, but he does not aid them in making true penance. It must also be noted that Repentance appeals to the folke on reasonable terms, as is seen in her statements to Anger (ll. 182-87), Avarice (ll. 263-86), and Gluttony (ll. 371-73). Even Sloth's confession is aided by Repentance's use of reason. None of the folke's confessions are made truly from the heart; none truly want to change their lives.

³¹ Stone, p. 663. See Burrow, pp. 250-52, for a different viewpoint.

pardon the folke might receive would have no effect unless they do all they can "to make restitution."³²

While the folke do indeed "think" and express "reasonable" sorrow for their misdeeds, they do not "feel" sorrow; there is no evidence of "contrition of heart" in them. Moreover, they fail to make satisfaction or restitution. In a real sense, therefore, their pilgrimage to Truth is doomed before they begin. Yet, although their pilgrimage is to fail, it does serve as a further reinforcement of Lady Church's and Conscience's instructions concerning Truth on earth for Will.

Repentance comes "in response to Reason" and his sermon, for Repentance is the "necessary prologue to all right order."³³ Repentance makes a "prayer of repentance" that is a statement of faith and a plea for amendment and mercy for the folke. The folke make their intellectual contrition and confession. They pray for grace and then determine to make a pilgrimage to Truth to secure a pardon for their sins. Yet, like Will, without the necessary aid of Conscience they lack the "kynde knowing" in their hearts and the wisdom to know the way to Truth. They need a guide. The folke do not need general guidance but a guide to show

³²Skeat, II, 204-205, 268.

³³Frank, pp. 21-22.

them the way to Truth, for it was "characteristic of the newly penitent to secure not guidance but a guide."³⁴ It must be noted, also, that, while Will received only general guidance from Lady Church and his visions of Conscience, the information concerning the way to Truth is "particularized when, after the examination and confession of the Seven Deadly Sins, the search for Truth takes full allegorical shape as a pilgrimage."³⁵ This development signifies that Piers becomes a guide not only for the folke but for Will as well.

It is here that Piers makes his appearance in the poem as "an instrument of divine grace"³⁶ to be the mystical guide for the folke's journey to Truth--to the Promised Land where Reason's law is preceded by Love and Grace.³⁷ His role is a double one; for, while he serves to guide the folke within the dream, he is also acting as a model and a guide for the dreamer. Piers gives to both the folke and Will instructions which, though grounded in "ordinary homiletic teaching on the good Christian life, reach out to spiritual matters within the compass of the mystic

³⁴Lawlor, p. 50.

³⁵Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), p. 3.

³⁶A. C. Hamilton, "Spenser and Langland," SP, LV (1958), 538.

³⁷Lawlor, p. 56.

alone."³⁸ Piers is no ordinary plowman, for his words are not ordinary; "he shows a far deeper knowledge of religious mysteries than we might expect from even the best of the obedient sons of Holy Church."³⁹

Although Piers is presented as a plowman, a figure of the poor and the exploited and one often used to "express the Christian truths of the meaning of existence" in the fourteenth century,⁴⁰ he is also the

. . . symbol of Christ and all that he implies--
the salvation and perfection of man.

.

Piers Plowman is an eschatological figure--both the way and goal of Christian perfection. He is both the model and the norm of human existence for Christians, and he can lead them into the transformed society--the Kingdom of God.⁴¹

R. W. Frank explains that Piers' name is significant because it is a form of the name Peter and suggests the

³⁸Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), p. 3.

³⁹It is here where Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), p. 4, believes that Walter Hilton's Scale of Perfection, a manual for the contemplative life, becomes relevant. The pilgrim in Hilton's book seeks a guide, and the guide speaks of the route to Perfection in much the same way as Piers speaks to the folke. Yet I disagree with Mrs. Salter when she states that Piers is an ordinary plowman. He is in mystical Illumination; for, as Mrs. Salter admits (p. 4), he reveals that he has a far deeper knowledge of religion than the most reverent sons of the Church.

⁴⁰Bloomfield, pp. 106-107. See also David C. Fowler, Piers the Plowman: Literary Revelations of the A and B Texts (Seattle, 1961), p. 107.

⁴¹Bloomfield, p. 107.

apostle Peter, the mightiest servant of Christ:

The name and role of the plowman are even more significant. Because of its idealization in various passages in the Old and New Testament . . . the plowman had become a symbol of human labor and primitive, uncorrupted human nature. A strain of mystical thought conceived of human nature as having originally possessed both a human and a divine character.⁴²

By equating Piers with both Peter and the idealized plowman, Piers may thus be considered "an embodiment of this mysterious half-divine essence in human nature."⁴³ It is through Piers that we "come to an understanding of the plowman's task as universal provider in Society" and that "throughout his lifetime" his "service is given not as a duty but as an offering."⁴⁴ Piers Plowman, by his very existence, reveals to Will the dreamer and to the folke as well as to the reader that "man can achieve salvation because he is assisted by God, [that] a divine plan, a scheme of salvation exists for man." Thus, the "'goodness' of human nature is a mystical hope, embodied in the fleeting figure of Piers Plowman."⁴⁵

As God came once to earth in man, He appears again

⁴²Frank, pp. 14-15.

⁴³Ibid., p. 15. It is well also to remember Conscience's prediction that a laborer would one day override law.

⁴⁴Lawlor, p. 59.

⁴⁵Frank, pp. 15-16. See also Howard Meroney, "The Life and Death of Longe Wille," ELH, XVII (1950), 17, who totally disagrees with me.

in the heart, soul, mind, and will of man through mystical Illumination and Union; so it is with Piers Plowman. Throughout the Visio, Piers is in Illumination. He is an inclusive mystical "plowman of men" for Truth. As an inclusive and exclusive mystic, Piers believes that within the "Temple of the body" dwells the Holy Spirit and that the whole world is capable of becoming a Divine Order.⁴⁶ Throughout the whole of Piers Plowman, Piers seeks not only to achieve Union himself but also to aid Will and to transform the whole earth and its flesh into perfect unity with Truth.⁴⁷

Piers knows the way to Truth because he has been there. Piers himself states that Conscience and Kynde Witte

⁴⁶Piers is both mystically inclusive and exclusive. He is inclusive in that during Passus V-VII of the Visio he seeks to transform mankind on his half-acre. During the Vita Piers is seen by Conscience as the one being that can save Holy Church and mankind. Piers is exclusively mystical, as can be seen by his turning away from the folke on his half-acre at the conclusion of the Visio. There he turns away from society for a time--but only because he needs to turn to God.

⁴⁷Most critics disagree (I have found none to hold this same philosophy toward Piers) with my interpretation of Piers Plowman. Other interpretations of the character of Piers that may be considered are Coghill, p. 19; T. F. Dunning, "The Structure of the B-Text of Piers Plowman," RES, n.s. VII (1956), 231; Gordon Hall Gerould, "The Structural Integrity of Piers Plowman B," SP, XLV (1948), 67; John Lawlor, "The Imaginative Unity of Piers Plowman," RES, n.s. VIII (1957), 114; John Lawlor, "Piers Plowman: The Pardon Reconsidered," MLQ, XLV (1950), 451; Elizabeth Zeeman Salter, p. 83; and Howard William Troyer, "Who Is Piers Plowman?" PMLA, XLVII (1932), 368-84.

showed him the way to Truth's dwelling place and that both Conscience and Kynde Witte made him swear to serve Truth forever, to do His will, and to do His planting and sowing. This initial statement gives credence to Piers' ability to lead the folke, for Conscience and Kynde Witte are "credentials established by Holy Church at the outset of the poem in her colloquy with the Dreamer. Conscience and natural understanding are the basis of our knowledge: they must exact from us faithful practice, [and] continuance in well doing."⁴⁸

Piers also states that he has been Truth's man for fifty years. He has followed the will of Truth in everything, and he will do anything that Truth bids him to do; Truth is pleased with his work. This indicates that Piers is in mystical Illumination and has established a mystical relationship with Truth. Embellishing this idea is Piers' statement, "Bi seynt Peter of Rome, / I haue an half-acre to eryl" (VI, 3-4), meaning that because of or with the permission of Saint Peter, the representative of Christ on earth, he has received his half-acre on which to do the will of Truth. This demonstrates that it is the will of Truth that he have the half-acre. Piers' use of the exclamation "Peter" (V, 544 and elsewhere) also may bear a direct

⁴⁸ Lawlor, Piers Plowman: An Essay, p. 55.

relation to the allegory,⁴⁹ for the fact that Peter is the rock on which Christ built his Church indicates that Piers is also a rock on which the Mystical Church will be built.⁵⁰ In addition to this evidence that Piers acts in accordance with the will of Truth in a state of Illumination and is a mystical guide for the pilgrims is the later identification of Piers with Christ (XV, 206; XVIII, 19-25).

Piers describes to the folke the Highway to Truth (V, 570-616). He tells them that the way is not only through obedience to Conscience and good deeds, observance of the Ten Commandments, through mercy, wisdom, and belief in the Trinity, the mother Mary, and love; but he recognizes also the necessity of Grace, Charity, the seven virtues, and of submitting to God's will. In the first section (V, 570-93) he describes "little more than an outline of the virtuous active life";⁵¹ but lines 594-603 are more spiritual, and the last lines "give bold and elliptical expression to a profound spiritual concept, familiar in

⁴⁹J. F. Goodridge, ed. and trans., "Notes," Piers the Ploughman (Baltimore, 1959), p. 276.

⁵⁰While the Roman Catholic Church is considered the "Mystical Body of Christ," I here speak of the Mystical Church in a different sense. Whereas the Catholic Church is a place where man is prepared to meet God after death, the Mystical Church of Piers is seen as one that will transform society on earth--one that will enable man to have union with God on earth.

⁵¹E. Talbot Donaldson, Piers Plowman: The C Text and Its Poet (New Haven, 1949), p. 168.

mystical writings--man's discovery, by divine grace and through divine love, of the divine within himself":⁵²

Biddeth Amende-3ow meke him . til his maistre
 ones,
 To wayue vp the wicket . that the womman shette,
 Tho Adam and Eue . eten apples vnrosted;
Per Euam cunctis clausa est, et per Mariam
virginem iterum patefacta est;
 For he hath the keye and the cliket . thou the
 kyng slepe.
 And if Grace graunte the . to go in in this
 wise,
 Thow shalt see in thi-selue . Treuthe sitte in
 thine herte,
 In a cheyne of charyte . as thow a childe were,
 To suffre hym and segge nouzte . a3ein thi sires
 wille. (V, 610-16)

Piers here speaks of the discovery that Truth dwells within man and is hung on a chain of charity. He also expresses the idea that man must submit to the will of God and never oppose His will. Piers, from experience, is speaking "most coherently of the mystic's apprehension of God in himself, the mapping of the divine into the human brought about by Grace."⁵³ Piers knows the way to Truth because he has made the journey himself and has since then dwelt as "one" with Truth in Illumination. His plow is not just the farmer's instrument but a way to and of Truth. Piers can thus be described as a "plowman of men"--a description similar to that of Christ and His disciples as being

⁵²Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), p. 7.

⁵³Ibid. See also the interpretation in Dunning, pp. 231-32.

"fishers of men."

After Piers has described the way to Truth, he follows Truth's will (VII, 1-4) by remaining on his half-acre to lead the folke in a living and working Pilgrimage to Truth and to their earthly pardon and salvation.⁵⁴

R. W. Frank believes that Piers is directed to remain on his half-acre with the pilgrims because "before mankind can perform the spiritual work which Piers has described for them, they must join in the work on his half-acre."⁵⁵ I believe that the living "pilgrimage at the plow" is more significant. Mankind must follow Piers' highway to Truth while living and working and spreading good will among others; one does not reach Truth by escaping from the realities of this work but by accepting reality, changing it, and by following the Way that Piers has shown:

We must recall that in Passus I Holy Church uses the word "truth" not only of God (Truth with a capital T), but also of a way of life. The word has a subjective reference to conduct, as well as an objective one to supernatural reality. She also says that the life of truth is the best way to reaching Truth. I think that Langland intended the experience of Piers and his pilgrims to illustrate this very biblical paradox ("I am the way, the truth and the life").⁵⁶

⁵⁴For a different approach see Dunning, pp. 231-32, and Burrow, pp. 248-68.

⁵⁵Frank, p. 24.

⁵⁶Burrow, p. 258. Note that the statement "'I am *via et veritas*,' seith Cryst. 'I may auauunce alle'" (IX, 159) reinforces this idea and that the statement from John 14:16

The life of the pilgrimage at the plow is to be identified with the life of truth as defined by Lady Church.⁵⁷ It is therefore meaningful that the Pardon is given only to Piers and to those who help him (VII, 6-8), for man must do well his duty in this world (VI, 13-113) as well as lead the life described by Piers (V, 570-616)⁵⁸ in order to achieve inclusive union with Truth.

Piers instructs the folke by his example; but, as their activities in the text reveal, he is inadequate for their needs. Their contrition and confession were made as the result of Reason and for no other motive. They have

can also be seen as an organizing principle in Piers Plowman. For a brief discussion of this, see Meroney, p. 9.

⁵⁷Burrow, p. 259, agrees: "I hold, then, that Piers and his faithful followers . . . are on the highway to Truth, . . . when they stay at home labouring in their vocation and helping their neighbors, since this is the way of truth which Truth himself taught. They are worshipping him not in Jerusalem but in spirit--'by their lives' as Piers says (VI, 103)."

⁵⁸Another aspect of this pilgrimage is pointed out by Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), pp. 8-9: "The pilgrimage to Truth, once announced, is never abandoned. It is the great imaginative motif of the whole work; the activity of travel, whether material or spiritual, involves the major characters of the allegory--Piers and the dreamer, no less than minor figures such as Conscience and Patience and Hawkin, the unreformed man of active life. The successive searches for the three lives or states, Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, are only subdivisions of the large search for Truth. Struggle towards illumination, on every level . . . is a constant element in the shifting dream-world to which Langland admits. And the main pattern of this journeying is forecast by Piers, as he describes in the simplest terms what he knows of the approach to and the dwelling-place of God."

not made a true contrition and confession⁵⁹ in preparation for the pilgrimage, and they have not done well on the half-acre to make Satisfaction for the completion of their penance:

It becomes clear that confession without satisfaction through good works [and redde quod debes] is unavailing. Though the commons assent to the rule of Reason through their confessions, they must implement their faith and hope through the works of Charity.⁶⁰

They fail to do the latter. They have been ruled by Reason alone, without the necessary aid of Conscience, which makes their contrition and confessions incomplete and inadequate. Thus, on the half-acre they fail to follow Piers' moral way; they are unable or unwilling to follow the life of truth to Truth as outlined to them by Piers; and they fail to help Piers. As a result, the Pardon sent to Piers from Truth does not save them nor lead them to inclusive visions of Truth.⁶¹

The Pardon (taken from the Athanasian Creed) that is granted to Piers and to all who help him states the essential beliefs of the Church and answers again what one

⁵⁹Lawlor, Piers Plowman: An Essay, p. 56, agrees.

⁶⁰Robertson and Huppé, p. 241.

⁶¹Burrow, p. 257, believes that for the folke the purpose of the pilgrimage to Truth was to gain a pardon for their sins; so, according to him, when the pardon is received, it "signifies that the object of their pilgrimage has been attained."

must do to be saved. It is a statement of "universal moral law. It is given to him who has achieved the life of Do well."⁶² The Pardon states:

Et qui bona egerunt, ibunt in vitam eternam;
Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum. (VII, 110-11)

--i.e., those who have done good shall go into everlasting life, and those who have done evil shall go into everlasting fire.⁶³

The Pardon is "an affirmation that faith, hope, and the labors of Charity in the field are necessary, that the way of Piers is the right way."⁶⁴ It is an absolute and perfect pardon, a "statement of the Perfection enjoined upon all who would follow the good life."⁶⁵ But the Priest says that he can find no pardon therein (VII, 112). He is ruled by Reason,⁶⁶ and his use of Reason without the aid of Conscience prevents him from understanding the true

⁶²Lawlor, "Piers Plowman: The Pardon," p. 452.

⁶³Note that the words of the Pardon are similar to those said by Lady Holy Church (I, 94-101, 126-31, 173-201), the advice given to the folke by Reason (V, 24-60), Piers' discussion of the works of Charity in the first part of Passus VII, and Langland's description of Jesus' last words to his disciples (XIX, 177-93)--all of which support the validity of the Pardon.

⁶⁴Robertson and Huppé, p. 242.

⁶⁵Lawlor, "Piers Plowman: The Pardon," p. 452.

⁶⁶Lawlor, Piers Plowman: An Essay, p. 78.

meaning of the Pardon:

It is an absolute "Pardon"--upon absolute conditions; and as such the Priest describes it truly; it is "no Pardon." The Priest is right in this; but wrong in that he not only fails to appreciate the deep truth the Pardon has for its recipient, but over-zealously represses this genuine movement of Piers toward a truth higher than the validity of Pardons.⁶⁷

Following the Priest's rejection of the Pardon, Piers "for pure tene" (VII, 116) tears the Pardon in two, but this does not mean that he rejects it. In his tearing of the Pardon he is not tearing out or rejecting the meaning, for the words once said and heard cannot be invalidated; rather, he is symbolically tearing meaningless paper indulgences. Piers learns from the Pardon what he knows to be true: "Man must be saved primarily upon his own merits and by God's grace, and not by the aid of indulgences."⁶⁸ He realizes that Justice, as well as Mercy, prevails⁶⁹ and that the Pardon is only a token of the truth "that whoever in this world of affairs lives according to Truth and Love, Conscience and Reason, Penance and Labour, is in a state of Grace and will win

⁶⁷Lawlor, "Piers Plowman: The Pardon," p. 452.

⁶⁸Wells, p. 131.

⁶⁹Nevill Coghill, The Pardon of Piers Plowman. Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture, British Academy, 1945. Vol. XXXI of The Proceedings of the British Academy (London, n.d.), p. 54.

salvation."⁷⁰

From what the Priest has said, Piers instantaneously realizes that it is futile for him to try to correct society

⁷⁰ Nevill Coghill, "Introduction," The Vision of Piers Plowman, by Henry W. Wells (New York, 1935), p. xxi.

Frank, p. 28, points out that the poet is essentially demonstrating the right use of pardons, for Piers rejects "a bull with seals as the Priest interprets it to be." He is "symbolically tearing paper pardons from Rome." Frank explains that "one had to possess such pardons to receive their supposed benefits. But this pardon, once its message has been read and taken to heart, has served its purpose and is only a worthless piece of paper. (And so, the implication may be, are all pardons.) . . . Piers has lost nothing by tearing it." Frank also notes that Piers tears the pardon when the first goal is reached--the goal of serving the community: "He has fulfilled one commandment, to do good, to do good for the community. Now he hears another command to do good--to prove his worth as an individual in personal righteousness." Thus, "the tearing of the pardon signifies the end of one condition and the beginning of another for Piers."

Troyer, pp. 378-79, gives yet another explanation for Piers' tearing of the pardon: "Theologically men held a pardon from God in the atonement of Christ, but as the years went on men came more and more to rely on that pardon and less and less on the merits of their own deeds until they indeed believed themselves saved by it irrespective of their conduct. Though they were liars, bribetakers, wasters, and gluttons, they rejoiced with the faithful kings, knights, and bishops, until they in their own deception of themselves had destroyed any probability of receiving the grace which Christ's atonement had provided for them. And the plowman tearing his pardon was perhaps to be symbolic of how utterly futile the author felt men had made the atonement by their own lives, a view certainly not out of harmony with the note of despair on which the poem itself ends later on. Whether or not such an extreme interpretation is justified, it is apparent that the episode, as those preceding it, is one of multifold aspect. In addition to the moral lesson of the abuse of pardons, there is the revelation of the divine redemption of man in the pardon of Christ."

For a more detailed discussion, see Bloomfield, pp. 130-33.

without Conscience. Without Conscience the folke are not ready for Absolute Truth, and Piers, in his state of Illumination, can do no more for them. It is here that he enters the mystical crisis period of the Dark Night of the Soul.⁷¹ He has become aware not only of his own weaknesses and imperfection in comparison with Truth (with whom he has been so close during his years of Illumination) but also that he is essentially still separated from Truth and is not mystically married to her. Piers, who had believed himself to be spiritual, "so firmly established upon the supersensual plane, is forced to turn back, to leave the Light, and pick up those qualities which" he had left behind.⁷² As he realizes his separation from Truth and the necessity of his repentance, he quotes from the Twenty-third Psalm: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: / For Thou art with me." He accepts the will of Truth and vows to give up sowing, to offer prayers and penance, and to weep for his sins. Moreover, he reaffirms the necessity of his following Abstinence and the presence of Conscience

⁷¹Note that this also signifies a loss for the pilgrims. It signifies the failure of social progress without individual conscience.

⁷²Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness, 4th ed. (New York, 1961), p. 388.

to achieve Perfection. This prayer and Piers' vows not only indicate his great despair but also that this Dark Night of the Soul is and will be one of utter blankness and stagnation for him as far as mystical activity is concerned. The text of Piers Plowman also reveals this to be true. Piers remains absent from the text until he has achieved complete union with Truth through Mystical Marriage and Deification as is shown by Clergy's reference to Piers in Passus XIII (123-29), Anima's association of Piers with Christ in Passus XV (206), and his deified appearance in Passus XVI.

According to Wells:

In his last speeches Piers in the Visio states that he will change his course of life; instead of being so busy about his physical welfare, he will do as the apostles did and turn chiefly to the cultivation of his soul.⁷³

But, as I have indicated, it is not as simple as that. Piers is beginning his growth from one mystical level, or one level of soul cultivation, to another more spiritual plane--one that will see him in the Vita as mystically married to Truth and deified in the person of Christ.

Piers is persistent in his change of "attitude." He engages himself in an active argument with the Priest--an argument that "safeguards what we may begin to see as the central truth of the poem as it has been developed up

⁷³Wells, "The Construction," p. 132.

to this point--that practice, an actual not a theoretical conformity to the Will of God, is all."⁷⁴ This change of attitude leads the reader into the Vita and to the discoveries Will makes there. The argument between Piers and the Priest awakens Will from his second dream. Will, like Piers the plowman, accepts the value of the Pardon, for he decides (VII, 112-200) that doing well is a near certain way to Truth. And, like Piers, the dreamer turns to prayer and to a more active search for Truth in the Vita.

⁷⁴Lawlor, Piers Plowman: An Essay, p. 81.

CHAPTER IV

THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH IN THE VITA

At the conclusion of the second dream, the dreamer determines to seek for Truth actively. Unlike the folke of the field, he does not have a guide to lead him every step of the way. He has learned from Holy Church, Conscience, Piers, and the Pardon that to find Truth one must do well on earth; so, in the first part of the Vita he searches for Truth by searching for Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest.

The terms "Dowel," "Dobet," and "Dobest"

. . . do not possess individual meanings but are divisions of the generic term "Dowel" and when using them the poet had always a single, all-inclusive concept in mind, . . . they do not show separate laws or ways of life. They show only how man has been enabled to obey the law of love [as it has been presented by Lady Holy Church, Conscience, Reason, and Piers in the Visio] to a greater and greater degree.¹

Thus, Will's search for the three lives or states of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest "are only subdivisions of the large search

¹Robert Worth Frank, Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation: An Interpretation of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest (New Haven, 1957), p. 12. See also George Winchester Stone, Jr., "An Interpretation of the A-Text of 'Piers Plowman,'" PMLA, LIII (1938), 674; and Edmund Colledge and W. O. Evans, "Piers Plowman," Pre-Reformation English Spirituality, ed. James Walsh (London, 1965), pp. 126-31.

for Truth."² This idea is borne out by what Piers himself has told Learning:

And seith that Dowel and Dobet . aren two infinites,
Whiche infinites, with a feith . fynden oute Dobest,
Which shal saue mannes soule . thus seith Piers the
Ploughman. (XIII, 127-29)³

and by the fact that later in the Vita the "search for the meaning of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest becomes merged with the search for Piers the interpreter of truth, who is thus the symbol of humanity's quest for the way of salvation" on earth.⁴

Throughout the Vita the dreamer searches for what the "Plowman saw in a moment"⁵--complete union with Truth.

²Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), "Piers Plowman and the Pilgrimage to Truth," Essays and Studies, n.s. XI (1958), 8-9. See also S. S. Hussey, "Langland, Hilton and the Three Lives," RES, n.s. VII (1956), 149-50.

³Learning also mentions that Piers supports his belief that Dowel and Dobet are two infinites which by faith discover Dobest in the texts of "Love God" (dilige deum) and "Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle, etc." (domine, quis habitabit, &c.). (XIII, 126) But there is another text which governs the development of the Vita from Dowel to Dobest (as well as the poem as a whole) and which helps to explain the meaning of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. It is the fact that Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life: "'I am via et veritas,' seith Cryst . 'I may auaunce alle'" (IX, 159).

⁴Gordon Hall Gerould, "The Structural Integrity of Piers Plowman B," SP, XLV (1948), 67.

⁵John Lawlor, "The Imaginative Unity of Piers Plowman," RES, n.s. VIII (1957), 123. Note that Piers was ready for the knowledge of and union with Truth by reason of his long perseverance in simple well-doing, but Will must continue to suffer and grow throughout the Vita before he is fully prepared to live with Truth on earth.

The Vita, shifting the poem's emphasis from society to the active development of the individual dreamer, begins with Will's meeting with two Friars from whom he learns "the need of searching for Truth deeply and the vanity of relying upon persons" for mystical knowledge. Though he still has no mystical "kynde knowing" (VIII, 57), he learns from the Friars that no glib phrases can solve his problem of how to find Truth. He himself must labor; he must use his own wit, and go through the "disciplines of thought, study, learning, reason, humility and contemplation."⁶

The third and fourth dreams (Passus VIII-XV) can be designated as the "beginning of spiritual life proper" for the poet-dreamer Will.⁷ Dunning points out that this first stage of the spiritual life for Will, and for any individual, is actually an "emergence alike from intellectual error and moral disorder."⁸ It is in these two dreams that Will is purged of error and sin. Will comes to "know himself"⁹ as he actively experiences repentance, obedience, humility, and poverty through his visions of Thought, Intelligence,

⁶H. W. Wells, "The Construction of Piers Plowman," PMLA, XLIV (1929), 136.

⁷T. F. Dunning, "The Structure of the B-Text of Piers Plowman," RES, n.s. VII (1956), 226.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 227.

Study, Learning, Scripture, Good Faith, Nature, Imagination, Conscience, and Patience. Each "represents a progressive stage in his mystical development"¹⁰ and may be considered on the allegorical level as the progression of "his own maturing mind"¹¹ in the ways of the first mystical life through active Purgation.

At the end of Passus XI and the third dream, Will reaches an intellectual impasse--the value of learning as a means to salvation and perfection. He has actively questioned the "external" faculties of the mind, as he earlier questioned Lady Church, but he is unable to resolve his problem concerning "intellectual error."

It is here that Imaginatif appears to guide Will and by so doing initiates a new stage in Will's spiritual development. That Imaginatif marks the turning point in Will's progress from Reason to Conscience is indicated not only by Langland's use of the dream within a dream, which is significantly mystical and is a new technical device not used thus far. It is also indicated by Dame Study's informing Will that "Ymaginatyf her-afterward . shal answere to þowre purpos" (X, 115) and by Imaginatif's coming to

¹⁰Wells, p. 133.

¹¹Nevill Coghill, The Pardon of Piers Plowman, Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture, British Academy, 1945. Vol. XXXI of The Proceedings of the British Academy (London, n.d.), p. 34. See also Frank, p. 46.

grips most directly with the rebellious ideas that plagued Will at the end of Passus X.¹²

While Imaginatif, who claims to have followed the poet for forty-five winters, may be "associated with the concept of memory,"¹³ I believe that he should be considered as an intuitive faculty, as an "internal sense" in contrast to the "external senses" of Thought, Intelligence, Study, Learning, and Scripture.¹⁴ This "internal sense," which

¹² See Martin W. Bloomfield, Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse (New Brunswick, N.J., 1962), pp. 170-73, for a full discussion. Elizabeth Zeeman Salter and Derek Pearsall, Piers Plowman (London, 1967), p. 40, point out that the "dream-within-a-dream marks an attempt by the dreamer to come closer to grips" with his inner self in his search for Truth. "It marks a deeper inquiry--one that is more personal and private, and one that is significantly mystical."

¹³ Coghill, p. 39.

¹⁴ Bloomfield, pp. 170-73, explains that Imaginatif (or imagination as an internal sense) performs two major functions in ancient and medieval psychology that are now foreign to modern psychological thinking: "The first is to create from the sensibilia, the data the external senses [of thought, intelligence, study, learning, scripture, and the five physical senses] present to the mind, clear pictures or phantasms from which the active or agent intellect abstracts universals that are alone the subject of knowledge.

"The second function is to create pictures or images normally by combining or recalling them without any stimulation from the external senses. In this capacity, imagination is said to be an internal sense, and it operates in dreams or when for various reasons images must be called up." The operation of imagination does not depend on immediate external sense stimulation. While the external senses are able to collect data, learn, study, and feel, they are not able to incorporate themselves into any meaningful or cohesive self-evident truth for Will in his search for

may possibly relate or resemble the "natural knowledge" spoken of by Lady Holy Church, Conscience, and Piers of the Visio, "has a higher role as a 'transmitter of knowledge' in comparison with the external senses."¹⁵

In contrast to Will's argumentative reactions to the "external" faculties, Imaginatif, appealing to Will's higher nature, is able to point to the dreamer's experiences unopposed. This is seen when Imaginatif tells Will that if he had really suffered to learn, he would have understood more of Learning's teachings, and that with the help of Reason he would have understood Learning even better. Because he interfered, he was left alone. Imaginatif then reprimands Will, saying that he could become a philosopher if he would learn to hold his tongue: "Philosophus esses, si tacuisses" (XI, 406).

As Ralph Quirk suggests:

Imaginatif's function in the poem is to resolve the doubts about learning and morality which the

salvation and perfection. Whereas the external senses give bits of singular knowledge to Will, Imaginatif is able to pull together all this raw material and give it deeper meaning. The internal sense is a synthetic faculty, an "imaginative power," a type of "common sense" which "can give rise to true knowledge."

Therefore, it is Imaginatif who is capable of coming to grips with Will's problems. It is Imaginatif who becomes the one authority to whom Will can turn at this point in the poem. Only Imaginatif--a superior internal sense--can help show him the way toward mystical salvation and perfection.

¹⁵Bloomfield, p. 172.

Dreamer raised in the scene with Scripture. . . . Imaginatif shows the Dreamer the uses and limitations of the human intellect. He discusses "Kynde Wit," that is natural intelligence and what can be learned by the exercise of natural intelligence. And he discusses "Clergy," that is what can be learned from reading books. He demonstrates their usefulness for salvation, thus silencing the Dreamer's suspicion that they were of no value whatsoever. At the same time he is careful to show their limitations, for it was by asking more from them than they could provide that the Dreamer became intellectually presumptuous and cynical.¹⁶

In this way Imaginatif "values intelligence as a God-given gift" and not for its own sake.¹⁷

Thus, Imaginatif establishes the usefulness (XII, 72-91) and the limitations (XII, 30-71) of Kind Wit and Learning, contrasts them to Charity and Grace, and points out that it is Grace that endears man to Love. Imaginatif further remarks that while Learning and Kind Wit can be explained, they alone, without Grace, who is "above Clergy and Reason,"¹⁸ cannot save man.

Following this deeper dream of special enlightenment, in which the dreamer is instructed in the proper place of Reason and Learning and is prepared for matters more spiritual, Will is much rectified in heart; he dreams of

¹⁶Ralph Quirk, as quoted in Frank, p. 63.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸John F. Adams, "Piers Plowman and the Three Ages of Man," JEGP, LXI (1962), 29.

Conscience, who strengthens him and invites him to dinner with Scripture, Learning, a Great Divine, and Patience. It is during this fourth dream (Passus XIII-XIV) that we learn of Piers' elevation from the "Dark Night of the Soul" to a higher plane of mystical activity. We also discover that Conscience turns from Learning toward Patience to hear of matters more spiritual. Will too turns away from "external" intellectual pursuits and turns "inward" toward the "kynde knowing" within his heart. Will emerges from moral disorder as he views Conscience's efforts on behalf of Hawkyn, the sinful Active man who is reminiscent of the field of folke of the Visio.

Conscience and Will begin their "more" spiritual growth when they learn from Clergy of Piers' return to mystical activity. Clergy tells Conscience that Piers has said that the law of love is the only knowledge of any value. He then relates to Conscience Piers' definitions of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest:

'Now thow, Clergye,' quod Conscience . 'carpest
 what is Dowel.'
 'I haue seuene sones,' he seyde . 'seruen in a
 castel,
 There the lorde of Lyf wonyeth . to leren hym what
 is Dowel;
 Til I se tho seuene . and my-self acorden,
 I am vnhardy,' quod he . 'to any wyȝt to preue it.
 For one Pieres the Ploughman . hath inpugned vs
 alle.
 And sette alle sciences at a soppe . saue loue one,
 And no tixte ne taketh . to meyntene his cause,
 But dilige deum . and domine, quis habitabit, &c.
 And seith that Dowel and Dobet . aren two infinites,

Whiche infinites, with a feith . fynden oute Dobest,
Which shal saue mannes soule . thus seith Piers the
Ploughman. (XIII, 118-29)

This is the first mention of Piers since his departure into the "Dark Night of the Soul." It verifies his return to mystical activity.¹⁹ Piers' return and his doctrine of love signify not only the transformation of Piers into Unity (that he has progressed far enough through the "Dark Night of the Soul" and "beyond Prayer and Penance to represent the doctrine of love itself")²⁰ but also Will's growth of understanding from "external" to "internal" knowledge.²¹

Clergy's answer to Will's question of what is Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest is a quotation from Piers Plowman and is based on his doctrine or law of love. Piers' definition

. . . looks both backward to the pardon scene in the Visio and forward to the Sacrifice of Christ. The whole question of the problem of learning

¹⁹Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), p. 11, states that Piers' absence from the poem until the Vision of the Tree of Charity "does not remove him from the consciousness of the dreamer or the reader. He is kept in mind by skillfully placed references which seem to indicate that he is in some kind of activity, and certainly increasing in power and significance. By Passus XIII he has progressed far enough through and beyond prayer and penance [a stage I refer to as the "Dark Night of the Soul"] to represent the doctrine of love itself."

²⁰Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), p. 11.

²¹Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), pp. 11-12. Will's growth is indicated by the fact that he is now able to comprehend Conscience's words.

appears to have been reopened on a new level. The issue is changed from the value of knowledge to the possibility of knowledge. The solution, as demonstrated in the remainder of the poem, is that one must proceed from Scientia through Sapientia, to an ultimate rejection of both through insight, to achieve the higher quality, Spiritus or Grace.²²

Although Conscience does not understand Piers' definition, he accepts its truth because he knows Piers well and knows that Piers says nothing that does not agree with Scripture. Conscience then suggests that they should leave this question concerning Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest until Piers himself can come and show them what Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest are in practice:

'I can noȝt her-on,' quod Conscience . 'ac I
knowe wel Pieres;
He wil nouȝt agein holy writ speken . I dar wel
vndertake;
Thanne passe we ouer til Piers come . and preue
this in dede.' (XIII, 130-32)

Conscience's recognition that both he and Will need Piers to explain Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest by example demonstrates not only that Will expects at some time in the future to see Piers but also that one day Conscience himself will need to search for Piers, as he does in the eighth dream (Passus XX). Whereas Will rejected the definitions of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest given by the "external" senses, I believe that he does accept Piers' definition because Piers is in Union with Truth and has a higher means of

²²Adams, p. 29.

perception. Thus, in a special sense, Piers is still acting as a guide for Will as he did in the Visio; for, as Conscience points out, Piers is the only one who can resolve his problems (XIII, 132).

Following Conscience's recognition that he needs Piers to understand his definitions of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, he questions Patience and determines that he desires perfect Patience over all that Clergy (Learning) could teach him. He therefore leaves with Patience and Will to live as a pilgrim. During the remainder of this passus, Conscience and Patience relate to man's actions and his doing well rather than to intellectual "external" knowledge. They teach Hawkyn love, patient poverty, and the necessity of honest penance. One could say that this action indicates that the "dreamer's conscience, guided by Patience, goes on a pilgrimage 'to mourne for my synnes' (XIII, 50, 191) through the figure of Hawkyn,"²³ who speaks of his sins in a fashion reminiscent of the field of folke of the Visio.

²³A. C. Hamilton, "Spenser and Langland," SP, LV (1958), 543. Here Will is an observer of Hawkyn's experiences with Conscience and Patience. While Hawkyn is actively learning about Love, patient poverty, and the necessity of sincere penance, at the same time Will is passively and vicariously learning and experiencing the same thing. Will, too, through his vision of Hawkyn's mourning for his sins, purges himself of some of his sins and grows in self-knowledge. Here Will experiences Purgation vicariously.

In Passus XIV Conscience teaches Hawkyn, and indirectly Will, the necessity of the three parts of Penance and the doctrine of Contrition.²⁴ Conscience states that in order to be forgiven for his sins, man must make an act of Contrition that includes three steps: (1) Contrition of Heart, (2) Confession by Word of Mouth, and (3) Satisfaction in Deeds (XIV, 16-27). Following Conscience and Patience's explanation of the doctrine of Contrition, they expound on Christ's gifts of Mercy, Grace, and Charity to the contrite in heart. It is significant that, after Conscience has shown Hawkyn the need for true Contrition, he, the Active man, moved by Conscience, is able to be truly contrite (XIV, 28-96). This demonstrates what was lacking for the folke of the Visio--Conscience. Furthermore, this clearly indicates that mankind needs Conscience before it is able to make acts of true Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction. Therefore, this scene looks back to the Pardon scene where the folke, without Conscience, failed to achieve Satisfaction, and forward to the conclusion of the poem where Conscience, as representative of the folke

²⁴ See Frank, pp. 72-75, for his discussion of the doctrine of Contrition. Frank states that the doctrine of ne solliciti sitis "is the command which man is told to follow when caring for his bodily needs. To obey it is to resign himself to the will of God . . . this is an act of faith" (p. 72). Frank further states that Conscience's doctrine of Contrition and ne solliciti sitis and his stress on patient poverty (that the patient conquer) is "extreme and mystical" (p. 75).

in Unity, sets out on a pilgrimage to Piers so that he can save mankind and bring him to perfection. In this sense, this particular passage of the fourth dream marks a spiritual progression not only in Will's growth but also for Conscience in that he has begun to recognize his need for Piers. The passage also conveys the hope of inclusive Union for the field of folke.

The fourth dream has seen both Will, who participates as well as observes, and Conscience gain deeper spiritual insights from Patience and from their experience of viewing or helping Hawkyn. Gradually, through the influence of Imaginatif, through Learning's words of Piers, and through the action of Conscience and Patience, Will is persuaded that Truth dwells within his heart in love. He is prepared for the even higher faculty of Anima. But Will still retains some elements of Reason, for it is Reason who rocks him to sleep (XV, 11) for the fifth dream. It is Anima's purpose in this dream to teach Will that man can never be saved by sober reason alone but that only by Charity, Grace, and Mercy, by mortification, suffering, and perfect faith, and by belief in the Trinity can man reach the way of perfection as described in his²⁵ apocalyptic prediction (XV, 409-20).

²⁵Although "Anima" is the feminine form of the noun, Langland consistently uses the masculine pronoun in referring to the character.

While Reason "can understand in terms of the objective world," and Clergy "by learning," Anima's "insight transcends both by an entirely new process."²⁶ Thus Anima tells Will that his desire for knowing things and learning is impiety and "pride." It is contrary to "alkynnes reson" that anyone except Christ should know all things (XV, 52-53).

Anima acts as an Illuminating influence on Will as he gives him final preparation for his mystical Illuminating experiences in Passus XVI-XVIII:²⁷ "This passus, sometimes called the 'vision of Liberium Arbitrium,' might better be understood as the 'vision of insight.'"²⁸ Anima describes himself as the embodiment of the various faculties by which man can come to perfect understanding. He, Anima, is at once Life, Soul, Mind, Memory, Reason, Sense, Conscience, Amor, and Spirit (XV, 22-39).²⁹

²⁶Adams, p. 30.

²⁷Howard Meroney, "The Life and Death of Longe Wille," ELH, XVII (1950), 13.

²⁸Adams, p. 29.

²⁹Frank, p. 68, points out that the elaboration in Latin by Anima following line 39 of Passus XV "underlines the importance of Conscience. He is God's notary. He controls man's acts, accepting or rejecting proposed courses of action."

To this I would add that Anima's statement that the dishonest can break the bonds that Christ and Conscience have knit (XV, 236-38) indicates that there are indeed special bonds between Christ and Conscience, thereby the importance of Conscience in achieving salvation.

Will questions Anima about the Charity (XV, 145) he had learned from Patience in Passus XIV. From Anima's answer (XV, 145-88) Will exclaims: "'By Cryst, I wolde that I knewe hym,' quod I . 'no creature leuere!'" (XV, 189) Anima tells Will that unless Piers helps him, he will never truly see Charity face to face: "'With-uten helpe of Piers Plowman,' quod he . 'his persone seestow neuere'" (XV, 190).

Anima explains that Priests are unable to help Will because they know men only by their actions. Piers, however, can help, for he sees things more deeply; he understands the reasons and motives that make so many folk assume a false air of charity. Piers, like God, is able to see mankind's inner thoughts:

Ac Piers the Plowman . parceyueth more depper
What is the wille and wherfore . that many wyzte
suffreth,

Et vidit deus cogitaciones eorum. (XV, 193-94)

Neither dreamer nor reader can be entirely unprepared for the positive words that follow. Anima says that one can never recognize Charity by appearances or learning or words and actions but only by knowing the heart. Moreover, no priests nor "ne creature in erthe" can know the heart "but Piers the Plowman . Petrus, id est, Christus" (XV, 206).³⁰

³⁰ Note that this phrase does not appear in the C-text of Piers Plowman. But, as Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), p. 12, explains, Langland's alterations between the B and C-texts were "often prompted by extreme caution" rather than by a radical change of attitude. Thus, the B-text "stands consistent, although audacious, in its main approach."

In the Visio, Piers is unable to lead the folke to Truth because the man Piers himself, even in Illumination, cannot teach mankind to see into the motives of their fellow man and themselves. Now, with Anima's mystical association of Piers with Christ, we begin to recognize that Piers, in Union and raised to a mystically Heavenly plane, is able to bring that special knowledge to man by virtue of the Incarnation. I believe that this gives a new and true value to Anima's phrase "Petrus, id est Christus." Through Piers/Christ, "Heaven and Earth are united; the symbol Piers is filled by the reality of Christ: symbol and reality coincide."³¹ Therefore, I agree with Mrs. Zeeman (Salter) when she states:

It is not, I think, in mistaken enthusiasm that Langland gradually persuades us to think of Piers in terms of love and Christ. He is dealing with ideas very close to those of Hilton

Piers is by now a large symbol of spiritual activity. He is the "Christ element" in man which aspires, searches, goes on pilgrimage--"he it is that . . . desiryth." So Piers pledges himself to pilgrimage twice over--first when he offers to travel with the confused penitents on their lowly way to St. Truth and then at a high point of devotion, setting out on the hard contemplative path to God: "si ambulavero in media umbre mortis." He is the Christ-guide who leads and moreover is the way--"he goth befor the . . . unseably by priue presens of his hostly myth"--and he is even

³¹Nevill Coghill, "The Character of Piers Plowman Considered from the B-Text," Medium Aevum, II (1933), 125. Coghill agrees with the specific proposition of this paragraph.

Christ the object of the search--"he it is that is desyryd" So Piers directs to St. Truth, and, almost imperceptibly, becomes the "way" which Holy Church first sketched in outline, and he completed; he draws all with him, for he becomes love, "the graith gate . that goth into heuene" And at the very end of the poem he is to be sought for as urgently as St. Truth was at the beginning.³²

Following his association of Piers with Christ, Anima continues to prepare Will for his forthcoming mystical experience by advising him that he should build his life on Charity, and that faith in the Trinity alone can save him and the ignorant (XV, 382, 531-32, 563). Then Anima gives Will a mystical and "apocalyptic picture of the times."³³ It is reminiscent not only of Conscience's predictions in Passus III but also of Clergy's prophecy in Passus X (ll. 317-22).³⁴ It forecasts the coming of Antichrist in the eighth dream and also the hope that Conscience's search for Piers produces--the hope of bringing the religious mystic closer to God through an emulation of St. Anthony, Dominic, Francis, Benedict, and Bernard, who lived the life of humility, prayer, and doing good. Anima points out that when this happens, the Grace of God will grow; those who have been sick (in body and in soul) will grow well. Man's prayer and penance then will bring all men together in peace

³²Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), pp. 12-13.

³³Bloomfield, p. 121.

³⁴For a complete discussion of Clergy's prophecy, see Bloomfield, pp. 121-26.

on earth:

Ancres and hermytes . and monkes and freres
 Peren to apostles . thorw her parfit lyuyng.
 Wolde neuere the faithful fader . that his ministres
 sholde
 Of tyrauntz that teneth trewe men . taken any
 almesse,
 But done as Antony did . Dominik and Fraunceys,
 Benet and Bernarde . the which hem firste tauȝte
 To lyue bi litel and in lowe houses . by lele mennes
 almesse.
 Grace sholde growe and be grene . thorw her good
 lyuyng,
 And folkes sholde fynde . that ben in dyuerse
 sykenesse,
 The better for her byddyngs . in body and in soule.
 Her preyeres and her penaunces . to pees shulde
 brynge
 Alle that ben at debate . and bedemen were trewe;
Petite et accipietis, etc. (XV, 409-20)

At the beginning of Passus XVI, Will still expresses doubt that he truly knows the meaning of Charity, and Anima then gives a further description: Charity is a precious tree with a root of Mercy and a trunk of Pity; the blossoms are humble speech and gentle looks; the tree itself is Patience or Poverty of Spirit; and through the work of God and good men the fruit of Charity grows (XVI, 4-9). Yet, as it happened with Holy Church, this description is not enough for Will. He needs more clarification; he needs actually to see the Tree of Charity (XVI, 10-12). Therefore, Anima tells Will that the tree grows in a garden planted by God; its roots spring from man's body, and its soil is in man's heart. The land is leased to one Free Will (referring possibly to Will the dreamer) whose job, under the direction of Piers the Plowman, is to hoe the weeds (XVI, 13-17).

In this way Anima reaffirms the fact that the immanence of God's love is a gift by the transcendent God of Love and Truth, and that the body (Will) is to do well and follow the mystical life of Perfection of Piers Plowman.

At the very mention of Piers' name (XVI, 17), Will faints "for pure loye" (XVI, 18) into a deeper dream. This deeper dream concerns Piers Plowman, who in mystical Union represents the ministry of Truth on earth. He expounds on "the allegory of the Tree of Charity, with its Triune props"³⁵ (XVI, 21-72). This dream fulfills Conscience's statement (XIII, 130-32) that Will must find Piers to know what Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest mean, and it confirms for Will what Anima has tried to teach him--"that the search for Piers is a search to know himself . . . for Charity is within

Clerkis kenne me that Cryst . is in alle places;
Ac I seygh hym neuere sothly . but as my-self in
a miroure,
Ita in enigmatē, tunc facie ad faciem.

³⁵Coghill, "The Character of Piers Plowman," p. 119. states that when Piers "returns to the poem in person . . . he returns a changed being, . . . a teacher who can expound the allegory of the Tree of Charity, with its Triune props (XVI 21-72), and, later the Holy Trinity itself (XVII 38-256); a healer and tender of the sick and afflicted (in the person of the Good Samaritan, XVII 48 onwards; identified with Piers in XVIII 10); and a Joustier in whose armour Christ is to ride to His Passion (XVIII 21-25)." Whereas Coghill believes the change is one from a "simple, unlettered and incorruptible farmer" to the above, I believe, as is shown in Chapter III, that Piers is in illumination from the beginning.

And so I trowe trewly . by that men telleth of
Chariti. (XV, 156-58)

and grows in the garden of man's heart where it is guarded
by Piers."³⁶

Following the deeper dream (XV, 116-XVIII), Will
meets with Faith, who also reaffirms all that Will has
learned from his external and internal senses. Faith
prepares him for his actual vision of Piers/Christ not
only by instructing him about the Trinity and Faith and
by introducing him to Hope, but also by recounting his own
mystical experience of seeing the Trinity--the Three-in-One
as one God:

Thus in a somer I hym seigh . as I satte in my
porche;
I ros vp and reuerenced hym . and riȝt faire hym
grette;
Ther men to my syȝte . I made wel at ese,
Wesche her feet and wyped hem . and afterward thei
eten
Calues flesshe and cakebrede . and knew what I
thouȝte;
Ful trewe tokenes bitwene vs is . to telle whan me
lyketh.
Firste he fonded me . if I loued bettere
Hym, or Ysaak myn ayre . the which he hiȝte me
kulle.
He wiste my wille by hym . he wil me it allowe,
I am ful syker in soule ther-of . and my sone bothe.
I circumcised my sone . sitthen for his sake;
My-self and my meyne . and alle that male were
Bledden blode for that lordes loue . and hope to
blisse the tyme.
Myn affiaunce and my faith . is ferme in this
billieue;
For hym-self bihiȝte to me . and to myne issue
bothe

³⁶Hamilton, p. 545.

Londe and lordship . and lyf with-outen ende;
 To me and to myn issue . more ȝete he me graunted,
 Mercy for owre mysdedes . as many tyme as we asken;
Quam olim Abrahe promisisti, et semini eius.
 (XVI, 225-42)

Following this, Hope instructs Will on the basic law of God that man should love God and his neighbor. While Will is not sure of what Faith and Hope have told him, they are overtaken by the Good Samaritan. Will's vision of the Good Samaritan substantiates what Faith and Hope have taught him and also gives him the expectation of Christ's coming and Union with Charity by illustrating Piers' doctrine of love for God and man.

Will, his companions Faith and Hope, and the Good Samaritan (later identified with Piers and Christ and the representative of active Charity on earth) come upon a man lying at the side of the road.³⁷ Faith and Hope do not stop. The Samaritan does. Will watches him wash and bind the man's wounds, lodge him at an inn and pay for his care. As a result of this experience, Faith and Hope begin to follow the Samaritan, giving Will a deeper understanding into Faith's doctrine of the Trinity and Hope's law of Love. Will learns that he must believe in Faith and Hope and that he must practice active charity.

³⁷Note that the person of the Good Samaritan, by virtue of his identification with Piers (XVIII, 10) and by Piers' association with Christ (XV, 206), can be identified with Piers Plowman, Christ, and thereby Charity itself.

Anima, through his transcendent means of perception, has urged Will, in his search for perfection, love, and Truth, to seek Charity in the person of Piers Plowman. Here, as earlier, Will is actively searching for Truth and earthly perfection, and it is through his visions of the Tree of Charity that he does achieve his goal--Illumination.

Because of Anima's higher "means of perception," he associates Piers with God and Christ.³⁸ Thus, the Crucifixion and the Harrowing of Hell (XVI-XVIII), which are oriented by Faith and Anima's higher means of perception,³⁹ are experienced by a deified Piers--Piers/Christ.

³⁸Coghill, "The Character of Piers Plowman," p. 125.

³⁹Adams, p. 30. Dunning, p. 230, also notes that this passus acts as a transition point in the poem. Coghill, "The Character of Piers Plowman," p. 124, observes that in Passus XV "Anima is defining Charity to the Dreamer in a passage of extraordinary poetic force. The passus in question is headed Passus xv^{us}: finit Dowel; et incipit Dobet, and if this can be accepted as evidence, we are justified in supposing that somewhere within this passus is the turning-point away from the matter of Dowel and towards the matter of Dobet. I suggest that the turning-point comes at XV 114; for it is at this line that the nature of Charity comes up for discussion; now Faith, Hope, and Charity under the forms of Abraham, Moses, and the Good Samaritan, are the subjects of Passus XVI and XVII, so that this turning-point passage can be considered a moral explanation of or introduction to the Good Samaritan, who is an allegorical emblem of Charity; and this figure turns out later (XVIII 10 onwards) to be indistinguishable from Piers and Jesus, so that it is raised, and with it the whole discussion to the anagogical plane of heavenly Truth."

Note that Meroney, p. 11, sees the shift not at XV, 144, as Coghill does, but at XV, 189, where Will cries, "By Cryst, I wolde that I knewe hym, no creature leuere."

This, in addition to the fact that both Anima and Patience have recounted their mystical experiences to Will (XV, 409-20; XVI, 225-42), enables the reader to view Will's following visions of Piers/Christ as a mystical Union of Illumination with God or "another intelligence which purports to be divine."⁴⁰ Thus, when Will, on hearing the name of Piers Plowman, faints with sheer joy into his second deeper dream, he can be said to be surrendering himself to God in perfect love and to be in the beginning stages of ecstasy in his communion with Piers/Christ. In his mystical swoon Will "is immediately brought into a view of the highest spiritual import."⁴¹ He does not awaken from his dream until he has come to perceive that "love is his meaning." As a result, in Passus XVI through XVIII, the artistic and spiritual climax of the poem, "the positive revelation of God's love is made clear to the dreamer";⁴² and what happens after

⁴⁰ Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness, 4th ed. (New York, 1961), p. 241. See Chapter II.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Zeeman Salter, Piers Plowman: An Introduction (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 94.

⁴² Salter, p. 92. The end of this quotation reads: "What happens after this section (Passus XIX-XX) happens on a lower level" (p. 92). I contend that it is not a "lower level" but a different level of emphasis. If anything, it is the beginning of inclusive mysticism for the folke in that Conscience, by seeking Piers Plowman, seeks to transform the whole world and to transform all mankind into some approximation of perfection. Viewed this way, the poem shifts from an emphasis on Will's exclusive

this section (Passus XIX-XX) happens on a different mystical level.

As confirmation of what Will has learned about Divine Love and Truth, he is allowed to witness the Crucifixion and the "more dramatic" Harrowing of Hell in the sixth dream (Passus XVIII).⁴³ The gates are indeed opened to him by Grace as he sees Truth bound by Charity, Christ willingly sacrificed so that He may gain entry into man's heart, and the Resurrection of the dead that follows. Through this magnificent re-enacted drama of the Passion and Death of Christ, the Resurrection and the Harrowing of Hell, this "vision of love,"⁴⁴ the dreamer is convinced "that the love of God is the supreme truth,"⁴⁵ and of the power of Truth,

mystical progression to the mystical (apocalyptic) progress of the Conscience of mankind.

⁴³Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), p. 9, agrees with this statement. Note that the Harrowing of Hell is more dramatic than the scene concerning Christ's Passion. It is reminiscent of the dramatic flavor of the Visio scenes of Lady Mede and the Confessions of the Seven Deadly Sins, and indicates that the Incarnation is the supreme example of Justice and Reason tempered with Mercy. "In the Harrowing of Hell, reason and love become one and life triumphs over death" (Bloomfield, p. 124). This victory of life over death and of Piers/Christ over evil is a heilsgeschichtliche vision of the world (Bloomfield, pp. 122-26) and is described in apocalyptic terms. It not only refers to Conscience's prediction in the third dream, but it also foreshadows the Last Judgment as well as Conscience's search for Piers in Passus XX.

⁴⁴Gerould, p. 70.

⁴⁵Ibid.

Grace, and Mercy extended to man by Christ.⁴⁶ At the conclusion of Passus XVIII, Will is indeed "roofed over by love" and knows that Truth sits in his heart:

The anagogical truth of this dream sees Will's mystical surrender to God in perfect love--the dying of the self in an ecstasy of communion with God the dreamer, witnessing divine love suffering, learns his moral lesson of love⁴⁷

At the beginning of this dream, Will witnesses Christ's entry into Jerusalem, and he immediately associates Christ with Piers Plowman and the Good Samaritan: "One semblable to the Samaritan . and some-del to Piers the Plowman" (XVIII, 10). Will questions the meaning of what is happening and is told by Faith that Jesus will joust in order to win back Piers' fruit that the Devil had claimed --the folke of the Visio whom Piers was unable to save (XVIII, 20). Will then asks:

'Is Piers in this place?' quod I . and he preynte
on me,
'This Iesus of his gentrice . wole Iuste in Piers
armes,
In his helme and in his haberioum . humana natura;
That Cryst be nouȝt biknowe here . for consummatus
deus,
In Piers Paltok the Plowman . this priker shal ryde.'
(XVIII, 21-25)

Though Piers himself is not mentioned by name after line 33

⁴⁶Salter, p. 99, agrees with this.

⁴⁷Salter, p. 69. It is also interesting to note that even "the language takes fire . . . in memorial verse" (Dunning, p. 237) in this "artistic and spiritual climax" (Salter, p. 92).

until XIX, 6, it does not mean that Piers is not present. Rather, as has been indicated by Anima and Faith, Piers, in his state of Union and Mystical Marriage with Truth, appears in a deified state. It is not possible to distinguish one from the other.⁴⁸ Thus, in Christ's Redemption of mankind from Satan, "Charity, Learning, the Good Samaritan and Piers are made one with Christ, and He one with humanity."⁴⁹ Piers, by his imitation of Christ, has come to know Christ (Charity) within himself and becomes Piers/Christ. He thus defeats death.⁵⁰

Because of Piers/Christ's promises that he will come to earth and draw men's souls out of Hell (XVIII, 316-73) and that his mercy shall be shown to all mankind (XVIII, 391-93), Piers' Mystical Marriage with Christ and Truth is the basis of the poet's hope for mankind's mystical-apocalyptic salvation.

On the mystical level, Langland has his plowman-guide-Piers, in the person of Christ on the most exalted level, suffer all that he dictates to others about the search for the finding of Truth. He has enlarged the significance of Piers until he has become a symbol of the

⁴⁸Salter, p. 84, supports this. She says that Piers is still acting as a guide to Truth during this time.

⁴⁹Coghill, The Pardon of Piers Plowman, p. 350.

⁵⁰Hamilton, p. 546.

operation of the Divine upon man--God's mystical relationship with man through Christ. At his most powerful, in Mystical Marriage, Piers is neither wholly man nor God; he represents much more the state of grace in which Piers has gained and has become the apprehension of God within worked by love.

Though Will remains in Illumination during the seventh dream (Passus XIX) and Conscience returns to be his "interpreter and guide,"⁵¹ this dream is an apocalyptic vision.⁵² The emphasis shifts from Will's individual pursuit of Truth to the folke and Unity (the "symbol for the company of the faithful on earth") and to "the idea of [the Church, the] brotherhood of Christendom."⁵³

This dream opens when Will sees Piers/Christ all stained with blood and bearing a cross:

That Pieres the Plowman . was paynted al blody,
And come in with a crosse . bifer the comune peple,
And riȝte lyke in alle lymes . to owre lorde Iesu.
(XIX, 6-8)

Will is unable to tell if it is Jesus or Piers carrying the cross, and Conscience explains that Christ is appearing in Piers' armor:

And thanne called I Conscience . to kenne me
the sothe.

⁵¹Gerould, p. 71.

⁵²Bloomfield, p. 117.

⁵³H. W. Wells, "The Philosophy of Piers Plowman," PMLA, LIII (1938), 347.

'Is this Iesus the Iuster?' quod I . 'that Iuwes
 did to deth?
 Or it is Pieres the Plowman! . who paynted hym so
 rede?'
 Quod Conscience, and kneled tho . 'thise aren Pieres
 armes,
 His coloures and his cote-armure . ac he that cometh
 so bloody
 Is Cryst with his crosse . conqueroure of Crystene.'
 (XIX, 9-14)

Conscience explains that Piers is the human aspect of Christ and that Jesus, as conqueror, is both the "exemplification of perfection" and the way for "all men to attain this perfection."⁵⁴ The same holds true for Piers Plowman, who is in Union with Jesus/Christ/Truth.

After Conscience instructs Will on the life of Christ and the Crucifixion, which brings Charity to mankind, Christ gives Piers the authority to dispense pardon, mercy, and forgiveness to all men--to forgive all sins, but only on the condition that each man acknowledge his pardon and fulfill its condition of "redde quod debes," of making restitution and Satisfaction for his sins by paying what he owes:

And whan this dede was done . Dobest he tauȝte,
 And gaf Pieres power . and pardoun he graunted
 To alle manere men . mercy and forȝyfes,
 Hym myȝte men to assoille . of alle manere synnes,
 In couenant that thei come . and knowleche to paye,
 To Pieres pardon the Plowman . redde quod debes.
 Thus hath Pieres powere . be his pardoun payed,
 To bynde and to vnbynde . both here and elles-where,
 And assoille men of alle synnes . saue of dette one.
 (XIX, 177-85)

Thus Piers is granted the power to bind and unbind, both on

⁵⁴Bloomfield, p. 129.

earth and in Heaven, and to absolve men of sin if they make acts of true Contrition. This reinforces Conscience's teachings to Hawkyn and at the same time explains why the folke of the Visio could not be considered recipients of Truth's pardon.

As Will kneels before the Cross, the spiritus paraclitus (the Holy Spirit), who is Grace, descends on Piers and his followers. Grace warns Conscience against the deception and evil of the world, bestows gifts to all God's creatures who have need of them, and makes Piers her "procurator and reve" on earth. She commands Piers and Conscience to call together the common men (XIX, 209), and she counsels them in apocalyptic style:

For I wil dele to-daye . and dyuyde grace,
To alkynnes creatures . that kan her fyue wittes,
Tresore to lyue by . to her lyues ende,
And wepne to fygte with . that wil neure faille.
For Antecryst and his . al the worlde shal greue,
And acombre the, Conscience . but if Cryst the
 helpe. (XIX, 210-15)

Grace further instructs the Christian folke that Conscience must be their King. Moreover, Piers is Grace's manager, her bailiff, her treasurer and will receive the payments due for his pardon.⁵⁵ Piers is then to become Grace's purveyor as well as her plowman on earth, and he receives a team of oxen to plough the field of truth on earth:

⁵⁵Bloomfield, p. 134, says that here Piers stands for Satisfaction.

Englisshe.
 And whan this dede was done . Grace deuised
 A carte, hygte Cristendome . to carye Pieres sheues;
 And gaf hym caples to his carte . Contricioun and
 Confessioun,
 And made Presthode haywarde . the while hym-self
 went
 As wyde as the worlde is . with Pieres to tulye
 treuthe. (XIX, 318-30)

In this way Unity, "the fraternity of Christians, held together by faith and good works and by the grace and sacrifice of Christ," is established.⁵⁷

But this order established under the guidance of Piers by the Holy Spirit does not endure. Rather, Langland shows "the coming of man's ancient adversaries from within, Pride and the other sins; while from without the forces of Evil under the banner of Anti-Christ are mustered against the Barn."⁵⁸ Conscience is left in charge, alone and without the aid of Piers Plowman.⁵⁹ With Kynde Wit, Conscience

⁵⁷Wells, "The Philosophy of Piers Plowman," p. 347. Wells states in "The Construction of Piers Plowman," p. 130, that "the medieval poet . . . true to the premises already contained in his poem, regards religion and the Church as the Supreme Guide in life" I agree with this only to the extent that while some individuals, like Piers, can achieve Illumination or Union with Truth without the Church, most do indeed need the Church to be their supreme guide. In this way the ordinary Christian may someday achieve Illumination and Union--without the Church, possibly never.

⁵⁸Nevill Coghill, "Introduction," The Vision of Piers Plowman, by Henry W. Wells (New York, 1935), p. xxiii.

⁵⁹Because Piers has gone to till the world for Truth and Conscience is left alone with the folke, Coghill, "The Character of Piers Plowman," p. 131, believes that Conscience assumes the role of hero in the poem. But I contend that

attempts to order a defense of Unity against the corruptions of Pride, for he realizes that the people must either be led by himself and the Cardinal Virtues or they are lost, body and soul: "But Conscience the comune fede . and cardynale vertues, / Leue it wel thei ben loste . bothe lyf and soule" (XIX, 405-406).

Conscience advises the people who rally to defend him to go into Unity, and he "invites all who have accepted the pardon of Piers to dine on the blessed bread 'and goddes body under,' which Grace has given Piers the power to make."⁶⁰ He speaks again of the need for true Contrition, but some are unwilling to make Satisfaction and rebel against the Cardinal Virtues. This brings despair to a "lewed" vicar who urges Conscience, Grace, and Piers to guide them, recognizing that Piers is the true minister of God. He states in apocalyptic fashion:

. . . Grace, that thow gredest so of . gyour of alle
clerkes,
And Pieres with his newe plow . and eke with his
olde,
Emperour of al the worlde . that alle men were
Cristene!
.
And wel worth Piers the Plowman . that pursueth god
in doynge,
Qui pluit super iustos . et iniustos at ones.

Piers retains the role of hero because, as Conscience comes to recognize in Passus XX, Piers is needed to defend Unity and to save mankind.

⁶⁰ Gerould, p. 72.

And sent the sonne to saue . a cursed mannes tilthe,
As bryȝte as to the best man . and to the beste
woman.

Riȝte so Pieres the Plowman (XIX, 423-32)⁶¹

Following this, Will awakens from the seventh dream:

He has been shown a program of Christian activity in the world--a world very far from the Kingdom of God. Piers must continue to plow and sow, in the hope of a harvest to come. There is no discord between his task as plowman in the earlier vision (Passus VI) and the one he now undertakes. He is the guide and leader in both, and the double use of the image emphasizes his importance as a symbol. The way in which he leads us is the one for men to follow in respect of both material things and aspirations for righteousness.⁶²

He is the symbol of the mystical activity of Illumination and Union.

In the beginning of Passus XX, Will remains awake and continues his wandering until he meets Need. By rebuking him for being so faint-hearted and intemperate concerning poverty, Need discloses Will's falling away from the Union he had enjoyed while in perfect Illumination and also foreshadows his "progress" toward the "Dark Night

⁶¹Immediately following the vicar's despairing speech, a king, who states that he is the head of law, that he rules with the spirit of justice and is chief supporter of the Church, leader of the common man and judge of man, informs Conscience that he believes that he can receive Communion without any scruple simply because he asks for it. To this Conscience answers according to Lady Church's rule of "render to Caesar," saying that he may take what he needs within reason, for the King's law allows it. He can do so on the condition that he rule his kingdom well according to the laws of reason and truth.

⁶²Gerould, p. 72.

of the Soul."⁶³

Following this extra-visionary colloquy with Need, Will falls to sleep (the eighth dream, XX, 50) and dreams of the coming of Antichrist in "his last apocalyptic vision."⁶⁴ Conscience summons all Christian men to defend Unity. Nature attempts to help him, in much the same way as Hunger tried to help Piers in the Visio, by sending Old Age, Death, and the Plague against the enemies of Conscience; but, just as soon as these tribulations cease, the men return to their previous ways. At this point Old Age attacks the dreamer, and the "Dark Night" descends upon him.⁶⁵

The ensuing interchange between Will and Nature is reminiscent of the dialogue between Will and Holy Church in the first dream immediately after the dreamer had been

⁶³Bloomfield, p. 135, states that there is a "parallel between Will and Society," for both are intemperate. Will denies himself too much; Society, not enough. Thus while Need praises the value of poverty, he also stresses the need for moderation, thereby justifying "poverty in terms of temperance."

⁶⁴Bloomfield, p. 252.

⁶⁵Coghill, "The Character of Piers Plowman," p. 112, says that "possibly Langland wished to stress the necessity of a renewed personal effort in all men, and therefore chose to portray them as fighting through the Dark Night of the Soul under Conscience only" Although Coghill admits that this is conjecture, he does have a point--one which can be easily applied to the figure of Will. Even Will's intemperance in the beginning of Passus XX indicates his falling away from the union he enjoyed while in perfect illumination. This second rebuke confirms it.

"mystically awakened." Nature's answers are approximately the same as Lady Holy Church's. Nature advises Will to "wende in-to Vnite" (XX, 203) and to "lerne to loue" (XX, 207). Will then takes Nature's advice⁶⁶ and goes through Contrition and Confession to Unity where he witnesses the attack of the Seven Deadly Sins under the banner of Pride against Unity, protected by Conscience:

And there, by conselle of Kynde . I comsed to
rowme
Thorw Contricioun and Confessioun . tyl I cam to
Vnite;
And there was Conscience constable . Cristene to
saue,
And biseged sothly . with seuene grete gyantz,
That with Antecrist helden . hard aȝein Conscience.
(XX. 211-15)

It has been incorrectly stated that, following Will's experience with Nature and his entrance into Unity, he is "free from all illusions"⁶⁷ and is actually entering into mystical Unity.⁶⁸ What these critics fail to recognize is that Will is unable to sustain his state of Illumination on his own, as is seen by his need of guidance from Need and Nature. Thus, without Conscience or Piers as a companion, he must turn to Unity for guidance to Truth. Since Will himself experiences a loss of individual mystical activity,

⁶⁶Bloomfield, p. 254.

⁶⁷J. F. Goodridge, ed., Piers the Ploughman (Baltimore, 1959), p. 313.

⁶⁸Meroney, p. 12.

he can be said to be entering into the mystical "Dark Night of the Soul." With his doing so, the conflict of Antichrist against Conscience can be seen as "the conflict [within and] for the soul of the dreamer and of all men."⁶⁹

It is here that Conscience, against the advice of Need, turns to Learning. Conscience then lets a Friar enter Unity even though it is against the advice of Peace and his own knowledge that the Friar is not needed. Only Piers can grant indulgences--and then only to those who are not in debt:

'We han no nede,' quod Conscience . 'I wote no
better leche
Than persoun or parissh-prest . penytancere or
bisshop,
Saue Piers the Plowman . that hath powere ouer hem
alle,
And indulgence may do . but if dette lette it.'
(XX, 316-22)

But Conscience, without the guidance of Piers and Truth, is temporarily blinded by Pride's use of sophistry where "reason is used against reason until such a fabric of error is constructed that the sense of right and wrong is destroyed."⁷⁰

The Friar makes penance so easy that he "wounds Contrition" and causes the folke to fall into a stupor. Through the Friar we see "man's corruption of the means of receiving grace."⁷¹ By the Friar's giving easy penance and

⁶⁹Adams, p. 39.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 38.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 37.

ignoring restitution, he destroys the sacrament of penance and further corrupts society.

Conscience, unable to resist the evils of Antichrist and unable to protect the folke even with the aid of Peace, finally recognizes his need for Piers. Conscience, calling on Nature⁷² to avenge him and aid him on his journey until he finds Piers, sets out on a final pilgrimage for Piers/Christ. He calls aloud after Grace until Will awakes:

'Bi Cryste,' quod Conscience tho . 'I wil bicom
a pilgryme,
And walken as wyde . as al the worlde lasteth,
To seke Piers the Plowman . that Pryde may destruye,
And that freres hadde a fyndyng . that for nede
flateren,
And contrepleteth me, Conscience; . now Kynde me
auenge,
And sende me happe and hele . til I haue Piers the
Plowman!'
And sitthe he gradde after grace . til I gan awake.
(XX, 378-84)

Conscience, like Will at the beginning of the poem and like the repentant sinners in Passus V, now sets out on his own pilgrimage. Conscience here is superior to Will, as he was in the Visio, "only insofar as he knows whom he must seek--Piers--and what the world needs"--Truth.⁷³ The repentant sinners of the Visio never completed their

⁷²Note again Bloomfield's comment: "Medieval man believed that there were compelling forces making for perfection and righteousness, not only within the individual and society but also in nature" (p. 144). Thus Conscience turns to Nature and the perfection with which Nature can sustain him until he finds Piers.

⁷³Bloomfield, p. 147.

pilgrimage to Truth because, as is seen in the Pardon scene and in Conscience's and Piers' doctrine of redde quod debes, they were not ready. Yet the end of the poem essentially returns to these folke, with Conscience representing them in search for Piers. The search for Truth begun by Will and the folke in the Visio will come to an end only when Conscience finds Piers.

As it applies to Will and the folke:

The stirring of Conscience towards Piers Plowman is, in its deepest sense, the stirring of man's desire for regenerative growth: to seek Piers Plowman is not only to seek spiritual authority, the ideal Pope, but to seek the inner sources of good, the materials and energy for perfection, the prerequisites for life's journeying.⁷⁴

of which Will has lost hold and which the folk have never had.

One, then, must agree that:

In the last analysis, the quest of Conscience for Piers and Grace, who are of course closely connected, is the quest for paradise and deification, which is the ultimate purpose of the human quest for perfection. Just as Piers begins as a plowman [in Illumination] and ends as a Christ-man [in Union with Truth], man may become through imitation of him like God; and it is by pilgrimage that all mankind, as a holy society, the Church, must take its way to paradise.⁷⁵

This last dream optimistically prescribes how Will and the field of folke are to reach perfection--through

⁷⁴Salter and Pearsall, p. 47.

⁷⁵Bloomfield, p. 149.

Conscience and the exclusive-inclusive mystical process. Even though Will is in Unity, neither he nor the world will find mystical Union with Truth until Conscience finds Piers Plowman and, thereby, Truth. The Truth that is sought is God. The pilgrimages by the folke, Will, Piers, and Conscience are pilgrimages on and of this earth.⁷⁶ Will achieves the mystical stage of Illumination and progresses to the "Dark Night of the Soul." Although the attempts at perfecting the folke of the Visio collectively through "reasonable confession" and Piers' guidance fail, their (Will's and the folke's) inclusive Unity with Truth is prophesied in Passus XX. When Conscience finds Piers, who has journeyed from the state of Illumination through the Dark Night to Union and Truth, the world of men will be transformed into a state of earthly unity and perfection.

⁷⁶Hussey, p. 143.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

If we take seriously the polyphonic narrative of Piers Plowman as it unfolds, we are forced to believe that Langland intends the poem to be more than just an investigation of evil or of the good Christian life or of the way to simple salvation after death. Many factors¹ in the poem indicate that it is directly concerned with the mystic's way of salvation rather than the ordinary Christian's simple interpretation of salvation, and also that it is both individually and apocalyptically mystical.

The poet-dreamer Will is either an observer or a participant within his dream visions. This indicates his

¹For example, the poem's dream method of progression which indicates Will's state of mystical privilege; the earthly setting and content of these dreams; individual passages concerning Lady Holy Church's answers to Will's questions which give them a mystical meaning; the description of the mystical highway to Truth by Piers, the plowman guide in Illumination; Truth's absolute Pardon; the teachings of the "external" senses, of the "internal" senses of Imaginatif and Conscience, and of Anima's higher means of perception; Will's visions of Piers/Christ; Piers' return as Piers/Christ in mystical Union and the actual "way, the truth, and the life"; the gifts of Grace given to mankind; Conscience's earthly pilgrimage to Piers/Christ; the emphasis throughout the poem on redde quod debes; and the overall direction of the poem as dictated by the pilgrimages of Will, the folke, Piers, and Conscience.

spiritual activity and the state of privilege he is in.² He reports to the reader not only what he himself experiences or learns either by actual participation or by observing others participating in his search for perfection. But he also observes the experiences and mystical progress of Piers Plowman in his individualistic search and in his attempts to help mankind, to augment the individual and social growth of Conscience, and to further the progress, through Conscience, of the field of folke. Thus, while the poem is concerned with Will's pilgrimage toward perfection, it is also socially oriented and "apocalyptic in its view of perfection."³ The poem can therefore be said to operate on more than one mystical level. It cannot be said to be just about Will or Piers or Conscience or the folke; rather, it is concerned with all of them and the need for mystical Truth on earth by all individually and collectively.⁴

²Elizabeth Zeeman Salter and Derek Pearsall, Piers Plowman (London, 1967), p. 16, comment that sleep presents "a different order of naturalness in a world, directly, and miraculously, subject to the workings of divine will." They also point out that the deeper dreams mark a deeper mystical inquiry and growth on the part of the dreamer--a growth and an inquiry "that is significantly mystical" (p. 40).

³Martin W. Bloomfield, Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse (New Brunswick, N.J., 1962), p. 105.

⁴Gordon Hall Gerould, "The Structural Integrity of Piers Plowman B," SP, XLV (1948), 61, agrees.

The search for Truth is first undertaken by Will in Passus I following his mystical Conversion in the Prologue. He seeks answers and receives mystical guidance from Lady Holy Church. During his passive Purgation, Will views the folke being led to lawful government by Reason and Conscience, and from this vision he learns of man's need for Conscience and Rightful Reason in his search for perfection. Will passively accompanies the pilgrims of the second dream and gains "passive" self-knowledge about falsehood and about doing well through his visions of sin, confession, and the life of "truth to Truth" as seen in the person of Piers Plowman.⁵ He learns of the need for Conscience and comes to understand why the pilgrims, led only by Reason, are unable to find Truth--why Truth's absolute Pardon, although valid, does not apply to them. Will learns from the Pardon that to find Truth one must do well and live the life of truth in this life as exemplified by the life of Piers. Yet while Will has experienced this Purgation

⁵A "life of truth" can be defined as living according to the laws of the Church, following the sacraments, and leading the life of truth as prescribed by Piers Plowman to the folke of the Visio. A "life of truth" is the path one must follow to reach mystical perfection and union with Truth on earth.

"Truth" is God. The life of "truth to Truth" thus means that Piers lives according to the laws of the Church and God and tries to emulate Christ in all ways (following Christ's statement "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"). By doing so Piers has been able to achieve illuminating union with Truth (God).

and learning about life and the "way" to Truth passively, he still must learn it from his own experiences, which he proceeds to do in the Vita.

In the Visio, Conscience is seen as one who possesses an individual natural knowledge of Truth--but one who has not truly awakened to the need for all men to search for and achieve Union with Truth on earth. Thus, while he aids Reason and the king in establishing secular law on earth, he is absent from the second dream when Reason and Redemption speak to the folke about their sins. It is for this reason that the folke fail to achieve Union at this time.

The folke of the Visio themselves fail to be mystically awakened and to qualify for Truth's Pardon because they, as well as the Priest, are ruled by Reason, are without the necessary aid of Conscience, and have failed to make true acts of Contrition. Reason fails to lead them to these true acts of Contrition and Truth because Truth "is incomprehensible by knowing." Truth can be approached only by "the endless marvelous miracle of love." Only "by love may He be gotten and holden; but by thought never."⁶

Throughout the Visio Piers, the plowman-guide of

⁶The Cloud of Unknowing, Chaps. IV, VI, as quoted in Rufus M. Jones, The Flowering of Mysticism: The Friends of God in the Fourteenth Century (New York, 1939), p. 221.

the folke, can be said to be in a state of mystical Illumination, practicing perfect charity. Piers knows the way to Truth and can describe the way to the pilgrims not only because he has been there but also because he has been sent to the half-acre by Truth to do Truth's will. Piers may be said to go through the "Dark Night of the Soul" (beginning with VII, 116) when he tears the "paper" on which Truth's absolute Pardon is written and vows, "Of preyers and of penaunce . my plow shal ben hereafter" (VII, 119). His Dark Night continues during his absence from the poem in the Vita to the point where Clergy (Learning) quotes him as saying that Love is the only true science (XIII, 124).

Will's Purgation and his search for self-knowledge become active in the Vita. He comes to know himself better and better as he experiences repentance, obedience, humility, and poverty through his visions of the "external" and the "internal" senses. At the end of his Purgation, in Passus XV, Anima acts as a liberating influence on Will, giving him the final preparation for his mystical stage of Illumination in Passus XVI-XIX. When Will faints with sheer joy into a deeper dream on hearing the name of Piers Plowman (XVI, 17-18), who in the Vita is in Union with Truth, he can be said to be in the beginning stage of ecstasy in his communion with Piers/Christ/Truth. Throughout his illuminating visions, he experiences directly or indirectly the transcendent love of Truth, and in turn he himself grows

in immanent love. Following this joy of Illumination, the dreamer experiences the mystical "Dark Night of the Soul" during Passus XX, "The Coming of Antichrist," for he is unable to sustain his state of Illumination. Rather, he becomes intemperate and, as is illustrated by the advice of Need and of Nature, Will again needs guidance to proceed further to Truth.⁷

In the Vita, Piers returns in a changed state. That he has passed from the mystical Dark Night into Union is indicated not only by his illuminating statements to Clergy (Learning) (XIII, 123-29) and by Conscience's statement that Piers can "preue . . . in dede" what Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest are (XIII, 132) but also by the following associations and identifications:

1. Anima's association of Piers with Christ--"Petrus, id est, Christus" (XV, 206).
2. Piers' representing the ministry of Truth on earth in the vision of the Tree of Charity.
3. Will's association of Piers with the Good Samaritan (XVIII, 10).

⁷Note that while Will is entering into the "Dark Night of the Soul," he does continue to report what is happening within his dream. I do think the fact that he has no more dreams to report after this may have some bearing on my argument (that Will has begun to enter into the "Dark Night of the Soul")--he reports no more; for, in his state of Darkness, he is stagnant as far as mystical activity is concerned.

4. Conscience's statement that Christ will joust in Piers' armor (XVIII, 21-25).
5. Will's association of Piers with Christ (XIX, 6-14).
6. Piers being given the power to grant pardons after payment of redde quod debes (XIX, 177-85).
7. Piers' identification as Grace's "procurator and reve" on earth (XIX, 251-56).
8. Piers' role as founder of Unity (XIX, 318-30).
9. Conscience's recognition that Piers is the true minister of God and that Piers alone can grant pardons (XIX, 423-32; XX, 316-22).
10. Conscience's final recognition that he needs to find Piers/Christ before Truth can be established on earth (XX, 378-84).

The folke, who failed to be mystically awakened in the Visio, also fail to show any spiritual interest in the Vita except when threatened by Nature. Yet, under the direction of Conscience, there is hope that when he finds Piers Plowman, man will be changed to an approximation of perfect manhood in Union with Truth.

Conscience appears to have grown in the sense of his social mystical responsibility between his appearance in the first dream in the Visio and his return in the fourth dream, in Passus XIII, where he not only gives guidance to Will but also learns of things more spiritual. From

Clergy's account of Piers (XIII, 118-29, 130-32), Conscience begins to recognize that both he and Will need Piers to understand Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest "in dede." This serves not only to inform the reader of Conscience's growth in self-knowledge but to forecast his actual pilgrimage in Passus XX. In the fourth dream Conscience also learns from his experiences with Patience and Hawkyn. When Conscience returns to the poem in Passus XIX, he returns to be an interpreter of Truth and a guide for a dreamer--a dreamer no longer in Purgation but one in Illumination. This suggests Conscience's own growth in understanding as well as his feeling of responsibility for the individual mystic (which he first demonstrated in the fourth dream). Then as the emphasis shifts from the way of the individual mystic to society, Conscience is given the even higher responsibility of ruling, protecting, and defending the Christian folke in Unity. As the forces of Antichrist become stronger and stronger (Passus XX), and Conscience makes errors in judgment, he becomes truly awakened to the mystical needs of society. He becomes aware of mankind's immediate need for Truth. As such, this awareness is also a personal "Dark Night" for him as he realizes that he alone and without Piers cannot save Unity or mankind.

Although neither Will nor Conscience passes from his Dark Night into mystical Union during the poem as Piers does, that Union and the Union of all mankind with Truth is

This mystical quest for perfection also gives the work its

. . . unity and movement; [and] since the quest for perfection is a perpetual struggle with opposites in order to transcend them, the form of a conflictus best expresses the significant content of that search. The dialogue of Will with his interlocutors, and the conflicts he sees, reflect the spiritual and material aspects of the journey of the soul and society to Christian perfection.⁹

My interpretation of the conflict, digressions, and characterization thus shows how a mystical interpretation of Piers Plowman brings to light the artistic unity of the entire poem and demonstrates that Langland's poem does indeed have a "definite plan, a consecutive and well linked development" from beginning to end.¹⁰

⁹Bloomfield, p. 149.

¹⁰George Winchester Stone, Jr., "An Interpretation of the A-text of 'Piers Plowman'" PMLA, LIII (1938), 657.

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